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Article

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Here is the final story in the trilogy of Chappie Jones, Yalna and Cayenne Pepper in their titanic mental battle with Ram Ferrars, the Evil One. Separate in itself you can still read the earlier two stories in Nos. 44 and 47.

ANKH

BY JOHN RACKHAM

o n e

I had no sensible reason for being in the British Museum that Friday morning, and there was little real interest in my gaze as I stood surrounded by the glass-cased relics of Old Egypt. I tend to envy those people who can give you chapter and verse, whim and circumstance, with precise times, to account for being in some specific spot at some given moment. All I can say is, my mind doesn't work like that, at all. A mixture of half-felt wishes, idle thoughts, and non-rational restlessness had driven me from the house in Putney that morning.

I can date the restlessness with some precision, at least. The comfortable foursome of Ken Wilson, Yalna, Uncle Hassim and myself had begun, subtly, to break apart, just two weeks previously. It would be slight exaggeration to say, rather, that I had been cast forth, in a non-violent way. In answer to an urgent call from the authorities, those three had plunged themselves into the abstruse and highly technical mysteries of their trade, Egyptology. I had known all along, that they were a trio of well-respected, professionally expert people, just as one

knows that the chap one meets of an evening in the corner-end local has a regular job from nine to five. But this was the first time that their 'work' had shown itself in concrete form. Being a trifle slow on the uptake, it had taken me a whole day to realise what Ken Wilson had spotted right from the start.

"We're going to be devilish busy, Chappie," he had said, "for the next few weeks, at any rate. You'll have to fend for yourself a bit." He went on to explain that the job was in connection with the business of the High Asswan Dam, and the flooding of the precious relics which still stand, in particular the Abu Simbel temples. Up to that point I was with him, and knew what he was talking about.

"We've been asked to add what we can to the total of research and information, before these precious monuments are either drowned or moved," he said. "It will mean hard and intensive work for all three of us." That was all right, too. I mean, I had read about this, in the press. How anyone, in cold blood, can contemplate the task of hoisting that fantastic stone-work bodily into the air, beats me. The Abu Simbel thing is probably the biggest rock-cut structure in the world. Rameses II, who was responsible for it, more than three thousand years ago, was the original of the famous Ozymandias of the poem 'Look upon my works, ye mighty, and despair.' I wonder what he would think, now? But at any rate, I knew about it. What I didn't understand was Ken Wilson's concern for me.

"I'm all right," I told him. "You carry on. I can manage. The only pity is, I can't help you. Old Egypt might as well be 'greek,' for all I know about the details. But don't worry about me. I'll manage."

I wonder if you've ever wished, as I have, for a week or two of absolute peace and quiet? You know, you've a dozen things you've been itching to get on with, and which have been put off for a slack moment, which never seems to come. Well, mine came, and it didn't take me long to discover just how poverty-stricken my inner reserves were. I managed to deceive myself for three days. I saw my friends for odd moments at breakfast and supper, but they weren't with me, at all. Cryptic references and meaningless words merely thickened the barrier between them and myself. And I had to face it. I was bored with myself.

On the fourth day, to make things worse, Hassim packed and took a plane to Egypt, to conduct some first-hand enquiries on various intricate matters. That left Ken and Yalna to work together as smoothly as the fingers on a hand, and I wasn't even a sore thumb. They could neither see me nor use me. I have never felt so absolutely futile in all my life. And this had gone on getting worse, until yesterday, thursday morning, and I had begun to toy, half-seriously, with the idea of going on a mystery coach-tour, visiting a holiday camp, or making a pub-crawl, when Ken Wilson drew me aside.

"See here, Chappie," he said, kindly but firm. "I'm sure you don't realise it, but you're exuding an atmosphere of screaming frustration so intense that we can feel it, Yalna and I." Of course, I was sorry about it, and said so. "It's quite all right," he smiled. "I understand, and I don't blame you. But, in point of fact, we are now into matters which need all the care and concentration we can bring to them, and you are putting us off. So, as the sensible way out, I am taking Yalna with me, up to the City. We'll be handier to the Museum, for references, and it will be a help, in many ways. And I'm leaving you all alone, here." Frankly, the prospect filled me with gloom, but I waved it off.

"Don't worry," I told him, again. "I'll be all right." But he wasn't going to leave it like that.

"Take some advice," he said. "Get yourself out and about. See a bit of life, as they say. And, with nobody to consider, you'll be free to come and go just as you please."

Like all advice, it was well-meant, and easy to give, but uncommonly hard to follow. It was all very well to say "Get out a bit." But where, and why? And, this was where my getting-out had finally got me. The British Museum, and Ancient Egypt in a set of exhibition cases. I think there must have been some sort of hazy idea at the back of my mind that I could 'learn up' some stuff about Egyptology, and thus be able to help my friends. It was the sort of reasoning that wouldn't have deceived an infant, and is a fair index of my state of mind. But the concentration of ancient relics did do one thing for me. They brought me to my senses with a jar.

Here I was, in my incredible stupidity, mooning about in the one place more than any other where I would be likely to run across the very people who had gone to such lengths to get out of my way. I doubt if I have ever felt a bigger fool than I did

just then. And horrified at the thought that, any moment, either Ken or Yalna might come through this room and see me. What on Earth would they think, and what would I say?

At that very moment there came the sharp rap of heels, in the quiet, and I looked up. And I froze. The very thing I had dreaded was come upon me. Talk of the devil. It was Ken Wilson. For one awful moment, I was torn between the desire to duck down and hide behind the exhibition case where I stood and the urge to shamle forward and make what apology I could. That moment of indecision led to another, and then a puzzled pause. Because there was something distinctly odd, here. It might not have been noticeable to anyone else, but it was obvious enough to me. As I have said, elsewhere, there is nothing, no one feature, in any way remarkable about Ken Wilson. Of medium height, dark-haired, calm, serene, almost withdrawn, he would pass in any crowd, unless he set himself to make an impression. Then, without any effort, he would dominate, catch the eye and the attention. It is something in the nature of the man himself, his personality, his 'presence.'

But, as I saw him now, in some incredible way, he had put it off. My mumbled apologies died on my lips and I stood there, some six or seven feet away from him, and stared. Then his gaze, strangely restless and fugitive, swung my way. He looked me full in the eye, no longer than it might take to see that there was 'someone' there, and looked away. It had been the casual blank stare of a total stranger. In that moment, with a little chill tickling my spine, my brain seized up and refused to go beyond that one point. He had seen me, fair and square. It must have been a surprise to him, to see me there. And yet not by so much as a flicker of an eyelash had he betrayed interest. If this was acting, then it was impeccable. And what else could it be? And—I groped, helplessly—there must be some good reason for it.

I kept my place, and my peace, and watched, trying not to be obvious about it. The more I looked, the more bewildered I became. He was obviously waiting for someone. He was, just as obviously, jittering with nervous impatience. He had one hand in a jacket pocket, yet visibly restless, while the other beat a veritable tattoo on anything within reach—the wall, the edge of a case, a glass top—and all the while he was swaying, shifting, almost dancing on his feet, like a hair-trained athlete waiting for the starting-gun. If ever there was a man wound

up like a spring, it was he. And I couldn't understand it, at all. This piano-string tension was utterly foreign to everything I knew about Wilson.

It was, it had to be, a performance, an act of some kind. That realisation was something of a help. If it was part of his programme that he refuse to recognise me, then it was up to me not to spoil it. So I pretended to be examining the scarabs in the case, the while I flogged my baffled wits for some possible explanation. I heard the harsher, more staccato clatter of high heels, and saw him turn, with a quick smile, to greet Yalna as she came through the same door which had admitted him.

"Took you long enough," he said, in humourous irritation, and she made a face at him before she took his arm. Together they crossed the room and went out, but not before she, too, had cast a quick glance round. Although I was half expecting it, this time, it was still an eerie sensation to have her look me full in the face and not see me. Just as he had done. Not so much as a quiver on her face. Shaken, but determined, I stirred myself and set away to follow them, as discreetly as I could. You may be sure I was in a rare tangle, by now. If I made a mess of the business of shadowing them, I might well ruin the whole web they were so carefully weaving. On the other hand, I was damnably curious. I just had to know what they were up to or go raving mad. And there was, too, the half-sensed, distinctly unpleasant thought that these two might well be in some sort of danger. I couldn't think what, but it was as obvious as the bobbing scarlet feather in Yalna's hat that it wanted something pretty desperate to make these two act the way they were doing.

Then it occurred to me that there might be an audience for all this, and I tried as best I could to see if there was anyone else about the rooms and galleries who was acting in a suspicious manner. But I gave that up, after a few moments, as common sense filtered back to me. There hadn't been anyone else in that room where I'd first met them. Therefore, this superb performance wasn't just a thing for the moment, but a total immersion in new characters. And, so far as I could see, they made no special attempts to confuse pursuit, or to act in any way other than 'natural.'

As I followed them through the galleries, down the broad stairs and into the street, I struggled, but could find no way of putting together the pieces of my thinking to make any sort of

rational whole. I kept turning up the word 'disguised' and throwing it away again because it didn't fit. Neither Wilson nor Yalna were in any way 'disguised.' They returned the nods and salutations of the Museum attendants in a quite casual manner, and I'd been close enough to them to be able to swear that Ken, at least, hadn't changed his suit since yesterday. I was almost as certain in the matter of Yalna's dress. It looked the same—and yet, not the same.

As I followed, thankful that there were enough people about the streets to make my task easy, I was amazed, and a trifle depressed, at the way she had changed. It was nothing physical—and yet, you must bear in mind that I knew Yalna, had seen her in many situations, had once carried her in my arms, almost nude, had watched her in the scanty ritual trappings of a priestess—and, throughout, she had preserved her own air of innocent loveliness. I'd have sworn that Yalna could no more look like a 'tart' than she could fly, yet I was seeing it now, in her every movement, even to the dart and dance of that absurd feather in her hat. My bewilderment was so great that I almost lost them.

I was only a few feet away as they came to a bus-stop, and, with good timing, they were aboard a No. 14 bus before I realised what they were up to. Cursing my slowness, I dashed forward and managed to scramble on as the bus moved away. As luck would have it, they'd gone upstairs, and I was able to lurch to a seat on the lower deck. And curse myself for a fool as I realised I had no idea where they were bound. I gave the conductor a shilling, took the ticket, and sat wondering what other insane folly I could get up to, in my stupid well-meaning way. The bus bowled along, by Hyde Park and on to the Green Park Corner. There I was, trailing my two best friends as if they were crooks, after they had given me the most obvious of hints that they did not want me interfering. What did I think I was, a detective? I'd have made a bad one, anyway, because I was so deep in my misery that I almost missed the flash of that scarlet feather as the bus halted by Green Park Station.

I scrambled to my feet as the bus sighed away again, and halted for a moment at the traffic signals. I got off, turned back, resolving that if those two had taken the Underground, then I would give up altogether. But no, fortune favoured me again, without giving me the hint to leave well enough alone.

The scarlet feather went bobbing on ahead, and turned right, suddenly, into Berkeley Street. Here the pedestrians were fewer, and I became belatedly careful. On into Berkeley Square. I hung back, to see them go on, then turn and mount the steps to a house. Perfectly ordinarily, Wilson fished out a key ring, unlocked the door, and in they went. I went forward far enough to be able to calculate the number of that door. I did not actually go right up to it. That piece of folly, at least, I was spared. Then I went back to Green Park Station, took a train to Putney Bridge, and thence home.

The walk over the bridge and up the hill gave me ample time to revile myself for being one of the biggest fools walking, and to be thankful I had refrained from putting my great foot in something which obviously didn't concern me. But it did nothing at all to choke off my frantic curiosity. Indoors, I made a pot of tea, and resigned myself to an afternoon of cogitating. Any idea I might have had of telling myself to forget all about it was too feeble to be worth bothering about. Two hours earlier I had been fidgeting in a vacuum. Now I had interests, with a vengeance, and not the vestige of a clue as to how to begin on them. All I had, apart from the incredibly odd behaviour of my friends, was that address in Berkely Square, and it made no more sense than the rest. Why there? Why not come home?

Or was that just another facet of the desire to keep me out of it? That was possible, and it rankled a bit. But what on Earth could any of this have to do with research into Egyptology? I reached the point, quite soon, where I just couldn't keep still. I went for the telephone directory, with some inchoate idea of getting information, there, about that house in Berkeley Square. You have a pretty fair index of my state of mind when I tell you that I actually had the volumes in my hand before I realised what a damned silly proposition I was entertaining. After a few minutes of nail-biting I thought of 'Directory Enquiries,' and realised that that wouldn't be any better. You can't just ring up the authorities and ask them to tell you who lives at such-and-such an address. They would almost certainly, and very rightly, refuse. I don't doubt that there are ways of finding out such things, but I was too muddled to be able to work one out.

Then, as I stood, in futility, the phone rang. I snatched it. There was no mistaking that dark brown, rich voice at the other end.

"Hassim!" I said. "Thank Heaven's for a familiar voice. You're home?"

"At the airport," he said. "You can expect me in about an hour. But you sound distressed. Is something wrong?"

"To tell you the plain truth, I don't know. But there is something very odd going on. You may be able to throw light on it. I certainly hope so. It's got me baffled."

"How are Kenneth and Yalna?"

"There again, I don't know. They're not here. They got fed up with my company yesterday, and took themselves off!"

"Ah!" there was a hint of amusement in his voice. "I see. You are restless, still, I think. You need something to do. If I may suggest it, we could go out, this evening, you and I. You agree?"

"Not you, too!" I sighed. "All right, I'll think about it, but you'd better wait until you get home and hear what I have to tell you, first. I'll expect you about six-thirty." For all my grumbling, I felt better, already. If anyone could make sense out of this charade, it was Hassim. I had half-turned from the phone when it rang again. This time, the voice was completely different, but equally familiar.

"Chief Inspector Ferguson," I said. "Nice to hear you, again. How's business? Crime, I mean. Look, if you're after Ken Wilson—or any of the others—you're out of luck. There's no-one home but me."

"I know," he said, crisply. "Wilson told me you'd be on your own, and that you would maybe be wanting something to occupy your mind."

"Now don't you start," I retorted. "I'm beginning to feel haunted by the sounds of people telling me to get out a bit and enjoy myself. If it's that kind of good advice, you can keep it."

"Nay . . ." he chuckled, ". . . It's better than advice. You can do a bit of a job for me, if you've a mind for it." That made me pause a bit. If he'd asked me that morning, I'd have taken him up like a shot, without any questions. But things had changed quite a bit since then.

"Depends what it is," I said, cautiously, and he grunted.

"It's this way. We have it all laid on to raid one of those shady clubs, this night. It's not a place you'll have heard of, I'm thinking. One of those hush-hush 'members only' things.

Third rate cabaret and strip-tease, on the open, and French films and a' kinds of other stuff on the Q.T. Skating right along the thin edge of the law, most of the time."

"I've heard of them," I admitted, puzzledly. "Never been in one, and I can't say I approve very much. But I'm broad minded enough to live and let live, so don't go counting me in on your side."

"That's as it may be," he said, gruffly, and it sounded as if his Puritan Scots soul was being strained. "We're not bothered about the rudery, not this time. We have good reason to believe that this place is being used as a front, as a gathering place for some of the big boys in the narcotics trade."

"That's different," I said at once. The very idea of drugs and addiction is enough to make my flesh crawl. "Count me in. But what exactly, do you want me to do, anyway?" He became brisk, at once.

"It's a' very simple. We've had men nosing about this place for weeks, and we've made one raid, but we can't get within a mile of anything solid. They have a warning system that's too good for us, and all our men are too well known. We know the big boys go in there—and we know they're getting their supplies, and turning in their take, but we can never catch them at it." I could sympathise with the irritation in his tone, but I was still puzzled, until he went on. "All I want you to do is to be there, and use your eyes. You've an eye for a face, and a good memory to go with it, forbye."

"You're very kind," I said, "but isn't that a bit vague? I couldn't undertake to memorise all the denizens of a night-club at one sitting."

"It won't be that bad. If you get there about seven-thirty and join as a member—that'll cost you about twenty-five shillings, at the door, and a bit of formal nonsense—then just sit tight and act as if you were out to enjoy yourself. But be on the lookout for any little groups who seem to be waiting for somebody—and especially any groups who suddenly up and depart, about ten-thirty, which is the time we'll be breaking in. And that's all. Give us ten minutes or so to get clear, and then you come along and report. All right?"

Well, it sounded straightforward enough. I can't say I was keen to spend an evening in such circumstances, but it might

be interesting, at that. Then I thought of Hassim, and told Ferguson.

"It'll seem a bit churlish to go off and leave him, on his first night home," I said. "He's just back from Egypt. But he did say something, on the phone, about going out for the evening. Would it be all right to bring him along?"

"All the better," Ferguson assured me. "Two pairs of eyes might see more than one, and they tell me the food is pretty good, even if the rest of the stuff is third-rate." So that was that, and for a moment I stood, bemused, looking ahead to what might well be an unusual experience. Then the familiar surroundings reminded me of Ken Wilson, and Yalna, the old bafflement surged back, and I grew impatient for Hassim to get home, so that I could tell him all about it. My subconscious must have been sleeping on the job in the interval, for there came no sudden flash of inspiration or enlightenment. Just a muddle. A glance at my watch assured me that I had half-an-hour yet before Hassim would arrive, and I decided to use up some of that time in washing, dressing, sorting out my best suit and an appropriate tie.

t w o

The tie presented quite a bit of trouble. All my ties were either too jovial altogether, or the plain black from my Naval uniform days, and I wanted something in between. I wandered into Wilson's room, in the hope of finding and borrowing one of his that would be more in keeping with my need. It was a quiet, simple room, almost severe in its simplicity, and quite in keeping with the character of the man himself. What colour there was spoke in muted tones of grey and green.

Finding a tie that suited, I went over to his dressing table to fashion the knot, and my eye was caught by the only thing that had anything of the exotic about it in the whole room. It stood on his dressing table, black and glossy, about four inches high, an ebony 'crux ansata.' A cross with a loop for the top member. Old Egypt's symbol for eternal life, and older, by far, than any Christian cross. This actual object was something more than five thousand years old, a genuine and very valuable piece. As a collector's item, it was practically priceless. Yet he left it standing here, quite openly, on his dressing-table. I had remarked on the seeming recklessness of that, once before, and his reply came back to me, now, as I looked at it.

"It's an immune object, Chappie," he had said. "Put me down as superstitious, if you like, although I fancy you know better. But I tell you this. No man with evil or unlawful intent could so much as pick it up from the table unless he was badly driven to do so. Still less could he walk away with it. That ankh is its own best safeguard." With all due respect, I had protested a bit, at this.

"Come now," I said, "surely it must have been stolen, in the first place, or it wouldn't be here. I know archaeologists don't *call* it stealing, but that's what it boils down to, isn't it?" And that made him smile, thoughtfully.

"I found that ankh," he said, "in the ruins of a temple. And it was a ruin, I assure you. Only experience and imagination could have reconstructed a temple at all, from the relics we found. Everything else was worn, weathered, fragile—but the ankh stood there, as glossy and whole as you see it now. What is more, seven other members of the team, all older and wiser men than myself, more expert by far, walked over it, past it and around it—and never even saw it. It was meant for me, I think. At the end of that season's 'dig,' I presented it to the rightful authorities, having taken full details and photographs. They gave it back to me, as a token of their appreciation.

"Since then, there have been at least three attempts to steal it from me. The first, while we were still in Egypt, was a common thief, almost certainly in the pay of someone else, or just a tomb-robber's descendant. He was found with it in his hand, and not a mark on him. But he was very dead. Again, from this very house, a very astute and not too scrupulous dealer actually managed to walk off with it. He kept it two days, returned it by registered post, and has been in and out of one nursing home after another ever since. The third occasion was when I, rather foolishly, gave way to an urge to have it mounted in a silver stand. The jeweller—no names, now—was knocked down and killed in the street, clutching the thing in his hand. Only it wasn't the real one, at all, but a copy he had had made up. The real one, this one, was delivered here, that evening, by the postman. It came out, subsequently, that the jeweller had been a very bad man indeed. So, you see?"

His words, all very quiet and calm, had seemed to hang in the air, and they made me half afraid to touch the thing. Then he had smiled again.

"Pick it up," he invited, gently. "It won't hurt *you*, you know." I had picked it up, then. I did so again, now. It felt cool, and smooth, and quite ordinary. But it was, somehow, reassuring. And, after what I had seen that morning, I needed any reassurance I could get. Just having it in my hand made me feel better, and I have long since learned better than to scoff at amulets and good luck charms. I have seen something of what their opposites can do. The click of the front door interrupted my musings, and, on impulse, I dropped the thing into my jacket pocket, and went hurrying down to meet Hassim.

Abdul Hassim Affir tops my six-foot three by an inch and he has a stone the advantage of me in weight, yet he can move like a dancer, with the same serene calm that is so characteristic of the other two. Or was. The very sight of him emphasised my feeling of prickly 'wrongness' about Wilson and Yalna, the way I'd seen them last.

"It is always good to come home, Chappie," he said, in his rich rolling voice. "Egypt has withstood the winds of change for better than five thousand years—until now. But it is failing fast, I fear." Then he hesitated, and eyed my unusual finery. "You have taken my suggestion, then, and we are to go out for dinner?"

"Yes and no," I said. "Let's get that bit cleared up, first," and I gave him the gist of Ferguson's request, with a delicate hint as to just what sort of evening we might be in for. Not that I had any first-hand knowledge, of course, but I thought it was only fair to warn him. And he was amused at my awkwardness.

"Do not worry that I shall be offended," he chuckled. "It is only the insular English and the adolescent American who confuse pleasure with wickedness, with the forbidden. They call it adding 'spice,' which may be a good thing with food, but is an error with pleasure. How can an element of risk, or impropriety, add anything to pleasure?"

"Don't ask me," I shrugged. "It's the way we are, I suppose. A hangover from our Puritan ancestors, from Victorianism, possibly."

"Perhaps. Now, in the countries of the East, we have beauty, and entertainment, while we eat, as a matter of course. And we think it much more sensible that beautiful girls should dance before us, for our admiration, not with us, while we perform clumsily." It sounded logical enough, the way he said

it, and I was in no mood to argue. At any rate, there wasn't much danger that he would be shocked at anything we would see. While he washed and changed, I leafed through a current copy of *What's On*, and found a two-line advertisement about our place.

'Club Thebes,' it said. 'An authentic gem of Ancient Egypt, reconstructed for you in the heart of London. Gorgeous temple priestesses will dance for you as they did for the Pharaohs of old!' There followed a short list of unlikely-sounding names, presumably the dancers.

"Coals to Newcastle, for you," I said, and Hassim chuckled again.

"Genuine Egypt—and yet they call it 'Thebes,' which is Greek."

That gave us a grin while we waited for the taxi. I had hoped to unburden to Hassim during the ride, but it was too short, and the mood was wrong, so I let it wait. Eventually, we were put down in a dim-lit side-street, under the brazen orange glare of a neon-tube contorted into the one word 'THEBES.' We were accosted by a small and sandy-haired doorkeeper whose uniform, much too big for him would have been more fitting for an Italian Naval Club. He took our confession of non-membership as a matter of routine, and directed us down a narrow passage into brighter lights. There was a smell-compound of paint, powder and people, and the muffled throb of music. *Song of India* in the Glenn Miller version, hence a gramophone record. That, by itself, was a fair warning of the standard of entertainment we were in for. We came to a desk, strategically arranged to stop us from walking straight past. The lady there was long past the first bloom of youth, and her jacket, of cloth of gold embossed with Chinese dragons, was much too tight, and glittered as she moved. But she was calm and resolutely smiling, made us wait while she rang a bell for the manager. The music went loud, and then soft again, as he came through the glass doors.

"Mr. Morros," she said, very carefully, so that one gathered Mr. Morros was a man who liked to hear his name pronounced accurately. He was small, plump, and shining all over, including his suit and teeth.

"Just a formality, gentlemen, you understand," he murmured. By the sound, he had been Greek, once. We gave him our names. He asked for one more, for the name of the person who had 'recommended' us. I suppose I should have

been ready for this, but I wasn't, and, for one awful moment 'Chief Detective Inspector Ferguson' trembled on my lip. In that infuriating way ridiculous ideas often have, it wouldn't go out of my mind, and there could have been an awkward pause. But Hassim filled in, very smoothly, from my side.

"Would Dr. Wilson's name be acceptable?" he asked, and Morros beamed at once, and even wider than before.

"That will do very well," he agreed, scribbling rapidly. "Dr. Wilson is one of our very recent members, you know, but in very good standing indeed. His great reputation, you understand. An expert on genuine Egypt—" he passed us a pair of gold-printed membership cards, and mentioned the delicate matter of the charge in a hushed voice. I paid, and followed Hassim to the counter where we disposed of our coats.

My daze wore off to the point where I could ask him,

"What the blazes inspired you to give *his* name? He can't possibly be a member of a joint like this—" But Hassim didn't say a word. He just put his hand on my arm, and we went to stand by the glass doors. Then I saw what he must have seen from the desk. There, at a small table about half way down the left hand side of the central uncarpeted strip of floor, was Ken Wilson—and Yalna. I saw, but nothing happened inside my head for quite a long while. All I could feel was a sort of wordless urge to turn and run away from there. But Hassim's hand was firm on my arm.

"I am as surprised as you, I think, Chappie," he said, softly. "I cannot imagine what Kenneth and Yalna would be doing in such a place. But we will soon know, when they tell us . . ." and that simple remark shocked my fuddled wits into action.

"No!" I mumbled. "Hold on a bit. It's not as easy as it sounds. Look, I promise you I have good reason for this—I will explain, in a minute—but, for now, please be guided by me. Please? When we go in, make for the other side of the room. Take no notice of them. Act as if they were strangers, as if you'd never seen them before. I swear I have good reasons and if I'm wrong, it won't take a minute to put right—but if I'm right—it's the only way. Come on!"

And in we went, into the noise and the coloured lighting, heading for the right-hand side of the room. I bothered the waiter quite a bit, as we settled at a table, because I insisted on sitting with my back to the 'floor,' and he must have thought

me insane. We reached a compromise, eventually, with me half-turned, and Hassim directly opposite, where he could see me—and the other two. We got rid of the waiter by sending him for coffee, and Hassim looked at me, strangely.

"I hope your explanation is a good one," he said, very gently

"It's going to sound like the ravings of a lunatic, I'm afraid," I told him, "but you use your eyes while I talk, and you'll see for yourself . . ." and I proceeded to retell, briefly, what had happened that morning. His dark face was intent and unmoving as I talked. Only his eyes were alive, shifting from me to them, and back. By the time I had done my tale, his attention was steadily on them, over my shoulder, and he was shaking his head, very slightly, as one who is completely puzzled.

"Had I not seen it with my own eyes," he murmured, "I would have found it hard to believe. Yet, I see what you saw, and I think I would have done as you did. It is obvious that they must have seen me, had they cared to, yet they have made not a sign of recognition. They could not fail to recognise me, so close. Therefore, as you say, there must be some good reason—and it is just common sense that we respect their wishes. But . . ." and his voice trailed off. I said the next part for him.

"Yes . . . but why? What's it all about? What are they up to?" And my hopes nose-dived as he shook his head, blankly. If Hassim couldn't think into Ken Wilson's thought-patterns, then nobody could. If this had *him* baffled, then it must be something really wild. I gave it a miss, for the moment and began looking round, to study the place we were in. It was just on eight o'clock, and the first floor-show was booked for eight-thirty, so, for want of something else to do, we ordered. Ferguson had been right about the food at any rate. It was excellent, even if we did have little appetite for it.

In fact, the whole place had much more taste than I had expected, at first. The Egyptian motif was prominent, although not always accurate. Some of the carvings on the lath-and-plaster pillars were more Hollywood than hieroglyphic, and the music, still on records, was modern oriental in the worst sense. But someone had been ingenious with the walls. These were simply huge glass panels, indirectly lit, on which had been mounted immense photographic transparencies of Egyptian scenes. With a couple of strong drinks, and a little

willingness, one could have imagined one's self sitting out of doors, looking across the desert, complete with palms and the silhouettes of the inevitable pyramids on the skyline. The effect was very well managed and must have cost somebody quite a tidy sum.

There were only two waiters, one for each side of the floor, and each looking singularly uncomfortable in a long white cotton robe and floppy sandals. They took orders, only. The deliveries were made by 'slave-girls,' of highly improbable colouring and astonishingly ample proportions, who jingled unmusically at wrist and ankle, but went wispily to gauze in between. The concealment was negligible. I could have wrapped any one of the 'costumes' around a cigarette packet, and still been able to read the brand-mark. One idiotic part of my mind found time to wonder just how far the 'floor-show' would have to go, to top this?

But the rest of my wits were hopelessly jammed against the main mystery, with not the glimmer of a clue as to how we were going to solve it. And not once did I dare to look at the two across the room. The distress on Hassim's face was quite enough to shake me.

"It is like a bad dream," he groaned, as he watched, "that Kenneth, and little Yalna, could act in such a manner. I can hardly believe my eyes, yet I must. It must be something tremendously important, to drive them to this."

"Maybe they're drugged, or hypnotised, or possessed in some way?" I suggested, but he shook his head, heavily.

"It is extremely unlikely, to say the least. And even if that were the case, it still does not explain why. What can be the point of this incredible exhibition? What possible purpose can it serve?"

Well, I hadn't any more clue than he had, and the floor-show came on, at that point, to make rational thinking even more difficult. It was a poor exhibition, to say the least. Nakedness for its own sake is not only crude, it can be boring. And there was little talent, here, either in the performers or the music. 'Ballet Egyptien' made a sort of sense, but Ravell's 'Bolero' was completely out of place. It provided a first-rate opportunity for some enthusiastic contortions, but little else. One girl gave a 'dance' in agonisingly slow tempo, wearing only her skin and partnering a six-foot length of wrist-thick gilded rope, to hackneyed snake-charmer noises from an oboe. It

would have intrigued Freud, perhaps. As a parody, it was almost funny. But the audience—and there was quite a crowd, by now—thought it marvellous, judging by the applause.

And I had got a nibble of an idea. It wasn't much, but I seized on it.

"Look . . ." I said. ". . . up until yesterday morning, all was normal. So it seems only logical that this lot is a result of whatever they were doing then—somehow. Point is, what were they doing? You should know." Hassim frowned at this. He was willing enough to talk, but there was little in what he said that I didn't already know. It was just research, and more research, into all the territory involved in the flood waters, and all that stuff about five thousand years of history being wiped out as the flood waters backed up against the dam. Due respect and all that, but I'd heard it all.

"Wasn't there some oddity, something special—anything? I mean, why did you have to go haring off to Egypt, so suddenly?"

"There were a dozen things," he insisted. "Small items, details, pictures, odd rumours to be checked out . . ."

"What kind of rumours?" I was snatching at straws, now.

"My dear Chappie, there are always rumours. The folklore of Egypt is rich in fanciful tales, especially that 'objects of power.' Strange amulets, mysterious books believed to contain great magic. The Talisman of Set is one such. The Book of Thoth is another. Kenneth had come across a group of such rumours, that there was another, a secret temple, alongside the great one of Abu Simbel, and that this temple shrouded a great 'object of power.' He asked me to look into it among the other tasks. He warned me, before I went, that there would probably be very little substance in it. You see, he has done considerable on-the-spot research in that region, himself. There is, indeed, such a temple—but it was investigated many years ago. All I did was to make certain that it was known to the surveying engineers. That was all I could do."

And that was all there was to that. My straw had failed. The minutes dribbled by horribly. We must have been a depressing sight to anyone who was concerned with the so-called 'entertainment' because never can there have been two people who were more obviously not being entertained. Then, after the thousandth glance at my watch, another thought struck me, made me groan aloud.

To Hassim's frown, I said,

"I've just remembered why we're here. There's going to be a raid, isn't there? Ferguson and his merry men will come bowling in here—and see that pair—"

"I know . . ." Hassim sighed. "The thought is like a knife. Nor will it be a pleasant thing for the good Inspector, either. He has shown himself a true friend." It was just like Hassim to think of that side of it. I felt ashamed. And angry, too, that I should have to be ashamed of my friends. The tasteless floor-show began again, giving me the excuse to shift my chair a bit. Not that I wanted to see the sorry spectacle, but because I could no longer resist the dreadful urge to look at those two. Against all my reason, I couldn't believe that this was just an act. Wilson was plainly and undeniably drunk, red-faced, noisy and unsteady in his seat. So, too, was Yalna.

It was utterly damnable to have to sit and watch her, with a shoulder-strap dangling, a drink in one hand, a cigarette in the other, her hair in her eyes and her skirt up around her thighs as she swung one leg in time to the silly music. And giggling. It made me want to hit somebody.

"If only there was some way of warning them," I mumbled. "To get them away, out of it, before the raid starts." Hassim shook his head, and his dark face was shiny with the effort to keep calm.

"That would neither be fair to Ferguson," he said, "nor wise. It might warn off the very people we are supposed to observe." And that was a point, too. I had done precious little observation, up to now, and it offered an excuse to turn my mind to something else. I began looking round a little more closely. There was a good crowd, now, and I had to get fixed in my mind what I was looking for. There wouldn't be anything outstanding, nothing odd. It is a fiction that wickedness can be seen on the face. The evil ones, if there, would be quite ordinary-looking. But I had to watch for groups who weren't very interested in the fare being offered, who gave any impression of waiting for something else. It wasn't much to go on, but, after a while, I did spot one little bunch.

Four of them, all staid and respectable-seeming, at a table about four or five places from us. Very quiet, saying nothing, just sitting there. And, right across the floor, at the corresponding table on the other side, were four more in the same quiet attitude. That was too good to be coincidence, so I

concentrated on them, studying their faces and what mannerisms they showed. But the time dragged, for all that. The atmosphere was thickening, and my head ached. I began to have a craving for fresh air, and to wish that the raid would come, and be done with. The girl with the rope took herself off to rapturous applause, and then Hassim grabbed my arm in a dreadful grip. I started, followed his eyes.

Yalna had got up from her table, unsteadily, to advance on to the now clear floor, amid a general hushed murmur of appreciation.

"Call that dancing?" she demanded, loudly, of no-one in particular. "You put that snake-music on again—I'll show you some *real* dancing!" and she began to fumble with the fastenings of her dress. I'd have been on my feet if Hassim hadn't held me back with his grip. Somebody out of sight set that oboe-music going again. There was a scattering of applause and encouragement, and I sank back, in despair, looking away. It was several seconds before my stunned eyes registered that I was staring at an empty table. Then, prickling, I looked across the room, and the other 'suspect' table was empty, too. They were off! The warning had been given, if my guess was right. But how?

t h r e e

I combed the dimness, desperately, and more by good fortune than anything else, I saw them. Just a vanishing glimpse of one of them disappearing right into the middle of one of those glass wall-panels. For a moment, I couldn't believe my eyes. Then I saw how it was done. This was a view of a mosque, with a dark-shadowed door-way—and this was a trick door, built into that shadow. As I stared, I saw that there was a red light glowing from one of the upper 'windows' of the mosque. It winked out as I watched. This then was the warning, and the escape-route—or a bit of it, anyway. And I had eight faces in my memory. I sat again, hoping that Ferguson would be satisfied. I looked back to the floor.

And the music cut off, suddenly. Yalna, swaying in the middle of the floor, still trying to unfasten her dress, looked up, blearily, as Morros came trotting on.

"Please return to your seat," he said, bustlingly. "Ladies and gentlemen . . ." he swung on the patrons, ". . . please do

not be alarmed. It is a raid !” And he gestured to where half a dozen uniformed police were coming through the door. They took it very well, on the whole. I heard a gasp or two, and a smothered curse from one gay party, but that was all. The constables were brisk, but polite. At least, the young chap who visited our table was. Just a quiet request for our names and addresses, and a look at our membership cards. That was all.

But the man who drew Wilson’s table wasn’t so lucky. Yalna had regained her seat, unsteadily. We saw the constable lean over, heard Wilson’s voice, raggedly.

“Mind your own blasted business. Why the hell should I tell you my name, eh ? So that you can hand it to the gutter-press, for headlines, tomorrow ? I’ll see you damned, first !” Even in the hushed silence, it was impossible to hear the constable’s quiet reply. But the smack of the blow was plain enough. The uniformed man went reeling back. Wilson got up, red-faced, rubbing his knuckles. The constable came back, doggedly dodged a second swiping blow, and caught Wilson’s arm in a lock. Then Yalna got up from her seat like a cat, to fling herself at the officer. He fended her off, awkwardly, and a colleague came smartly to his aid, taking her by the shoulders. She flung round, aimed a vicious kick at him, missed, and went down on the floor, sitting, and hard. And she stayed there, looking round as if wondering what had happened. The law was prompt and resourceful. In no time at all they had conjured up a policewoman, and we had the awful treat of watching the pair of them being marched off, in custody.

“That finishes me,” I said, hopelessly. “I’m going home. I’m going to take something to make me sleep, along with a brandy or two—and just forget that any of this ever happened. Right now, I feel sick.”

“I feel likewise,” Hassim growled. “But we cannot give up, now. There must be something we can do.” The rowdy atmosphere was quick to pick up again, and I couldn’t get out of it fast enough. Yet it was an effort to move. I felt as if I’d been emptied out, somehow. In dull silence we made our way to the counter where we got back our coats, and from there to the fresh air. And something else forced its way into my faculties. My report. I had to see Ferguson.

“I think I’ll give him a miss, until the morning,” I said. “I don’t want to see him, now. If it hadn’t been for him, in the first place . . .”

"Don't talk like a fool!" Hassim snapped, more roughly than I've ever heard him. "You can't blame the Inspector. Indeed, we should go to him, at once. We have no right to presume on a friendship, but he does have influence . . ."

"Now you're talking like a fool," I said, without heat. "You know what he'll say. 'I'm a policeman, forbye!' And so he is. And what can he do, anyway?" I was suddenly bitter. "Wilson sat up and begged for this lot, and he got it, didn't he?"

Nevertheless, we went along to that police-station which is less than ten minutes walk from Piccadilly Circus, where such events as we had witnessed are almost a commonplace. It was a gloomy thought, that what was on the order of the end of the world for us would be just a statistic, here. I was in no mood for pleading, although I was willing to try, until I saw Ferguson's face. Dour and bristling at the best of times, it was a positive thundercloud, now, and, by the look of his nose, he had been in the wars. For all that, he was strictly business-like. He saw us in a small office, and listened to my account with close attention, especially when I came to the descriptions of the eight people. I could see him ticking them off in his mind.

"You had the right laddies," he nodded, grimly. "Now, you say you saw the way they went out? Just hang on a bit . . ." and he called in a sergeant, with a rolled-up plan which he spread out on his desk.

"Mr. Jones, here, reckons they went out by a door in the wall. You're certain there isn't a back way out of yon club?"

"See for yourself," the sergeant pointed. "There's this stairway, but that leads upstairs, and we had our men up there, first thing. Nothing there, and no other way out, or down."

"Upstairs?" I queried. "We didn't see anything of that."

"No, not on the first visit. After a while, you'd be invited up there, where the real rude stuff is. But the point is, there's no way out, except where you go in. As a matter of fact, we could close that place, any time, as a fire-hazard, only we want the men to gather there too badly to lose them." I went across to the desk, and saw, as he showed me, that the club backed on to another building. "This," he said, "is a delicatessen and cafe. Above that, on the second floor, are private flats." After a moment, I was able to orient myself, and point to where the secret door had been.

"Right there, in the wall," I said. "It was plain enough, and I just assumed that it went up, because of the light that went out."

"But it couldn't have gone up," Ferguson argued. "We raided upstairs, and they weren't there. What's more, there's no door to correspond with that spot, in the upstairs, at all." I looked, and frowned, and thought. And I pointed again.

"Stop me if I'm being obvious," I said, "but it strikes me as pointless to have a secret back-stair that leads on to club premises anyway. For that, you might just as well go up in plain view. But what if that stair leads to those flats?" The sergeant made a clicking sound with his tongue, and Ferguson caught his breath.

"By jings!" he said. "It might be the answer. And, what's more, the only way to get at the club is by this road, which goes right past those flats—and there's your look-out post. It makes sense."

"They'll be miles away, by now," the sergeant surmised.

"Why should they be?" I demanded, boldly. "Didn't you say they were gathering to meet the boss, to collect supplies and share out the takings? Well, all they have to do is sit tight, Where they are, and let him come to them, now."

"It's worth a try," Ferguson grunted, and went for the phone like a terrier.

Within minutes he had recruited men to station themselves where they could watch those flats and the approaches, and the sergeant had been set some task to take him out of the room. Then, dramatically, the atmosphere changed.

"Ay . . . now!" Ferguson said, grimly. "What about this other business? What about your precious Wilson, eh?"

"I don't know what you've heard," I said, swiftly, "but won't you hear our side, before you jump to conclusions?"

"Heard! Man, I was there. How d'ye think I got this?" and he touched his reddened nose, delicately. "I stayed outside, letting the men get on with their job, and not interfering, until I saw who they were dragging out. Then, like a fool, I put my spoke in. Just a minute, I said. You've made a bit of a mistake, here. I know these two. They're friends of mine. So, naturally, the constable let go, and Wilson rolled up to me. Stinking drunk, he was, and the bit lassie, too. Who the hell d'you think you are? he said. Mind your own blasted business!—and then he gave me this," and he touched his nose

again, grimly. "A fine fool they made of me, in front of all the men. And what am I going to say to young Larkins, the morn?"

"Inspector," I said, "I wish I could explain, but we're as much in the dark as you are. I can only tell you what I've seen . . ." and I proceeded to do so, while he grew grimmer by the minute. Hassim took over when I left off.

"We are all good friends," he said, quietly. "We have shared dangers together, before now. I tell you this, Inspector. I believe there is something very wrong, here. Kenneth and Yalna—they are in trouble of some kind. It is as if Kenneth has given us a problem to work out, and is depending on us to find the correct answer. And he will be in desperate trouble if we fail."

"It a' sounds like fine rubbish, to me," Ferguson growled. "They're in trouble, right enough. There were newspaper men waiting, outside, wi' their cameras at the ready. There'll be pictures in a' the papers, the morn—especially the lassie, wi' her dress half-ripped from her back . . ." Among my feelings of rage there came a queer nibble from what Hassim had been saying.

"Do you suppose they were giving us signals of some kind?" I demanded. "If they were, I failed to spot them."

"Myself, too," Hassim groaned. "Chappie, I think the moment for caution and delicacy is past. We should admit our failure, altogether, and do what we should have done in the first place."

"What's that mean, in plain English?" Ferguson snapped. But for once my wit was quick enough to keep up.

"You've got them here, in cells, haven't you?" I asked. "Well, we'd like a chance to talk to them, that's all. That's not much of a favour to ask, is it?"

Perhaps I spoke more sharply than there was need for, and he glowered at it. But it was so obvious that I could have kicked myself for not seeing it sooner. By any standards, the need for acting was long past. There could be no point in impressing an audience that wasn't there, in acting in a cell. The more I thought of it, the more I liked it. I had sudden theatrical visions of walking into the cell, of Wilson smiling, dropping his disguise, and telling us what it was all about. But reality jarred in on me, as Ferguson snorted.

"You'll get precious little out of Wilson, this night," he said. "Not by my hindrance, mind. But the plain fact is, he's out like a light. Dead drunk ! Just to be on the safe side, we've sent for the local doctor to come and check the pair of them. I believe he's wi' the lassie, right now. Come on, and we'll find out." We went out into the station waiting-room, or whatever they call it, where the sergeant was busy at his desk.

"Spewing her heart up, in the toilet, right now," he said, in answer to our question. "The matron is with her. Doc's gone in to look at him, now, but he was stinko, the last time I looked in on him . . ." A door clicked, and we looked round, to see the burly matron, looking distantly disgusted but competent, half-carrying someone whose skirt was ripped to the thigh, and her head muffled in a huge towel. My spirits ran into my boots as she steered her charge to the bench by the wall. I put my hands into my pockets, to hide their trembling, and met something startling, and cool. Then memory returned. It was the ankh I had borrowed. I clutched it with mixed feelings.

"Fit to talk, is she ?" the sergeant asked. "Straighten her up a bit. These gentlemen would like to ask some questions." The matron gave Ferguson a querying look, and, at his nod, peeled the towel back. For one long, awful moment, I thought I had gone mad. I just couldn't believe it. Hardly able to recognise my own voice, I said,

"There must be some mistake. I've never seen this person before !"

"Chappie !" Hassim protested, at my elbow. "The time for such evasions is long past. We must not add deception to the mess." That made me turn, to stare at him, and at Ferguson, who had softened his grim face as far as it was possible.

"Ay, well, Miss Wilson," he said, gruffly. "You'll maybe be feeling a wee bit sorry for yourself, now ?" She lost something of her stunned look, and put on an uncertain dignity.

"My uncle will see that someone suffers for this barbarism," she muttered, "You have no right to humiliate us . . ." But my head was spinning, by now. I caught at Hassim's arm, turned away.

"I'm going daft, I think," I mumbled. "That's not Yalna, at all. It doesn't even look like her !" And I was shocked even more by the complete bewilderment in his face.

"I do not understand you," he whispered. "Of course it is Yalna. Could I be mistaken, who have watched her grow from a child?" This was worse and worse. To my eyes, now, whatever was wrong with them, this girl was golden blonde, with high cheek bones, fair skin, cornflower-blue eyes . . . and, even in her semi-drunk distress, a very lovely girl, typically Scandinavian. Positively not Yalna, of the black-mist hair, ivory skin, rounded curves, violet eyes—not the Yalna I had watched, most of the morning and evening. I had watched, and writhed, but never doubted it was she. Now I was equally positive that this was *not* her.

"Something wrong with me," I said, helplessly. "Must be. I'll swear that girl isn't Yalna—doesn't look a bit like her." To do him great credit, he took me seriously. Looking over my shoulder again, he shook his head.

"There is something foul, here," he said, slowly. "It must be all a part of the mystery. How do you feel, in yourself? Have you eaten something—done anything odd, or strange?" I shrugged, dimly. "Let me feel your pulse," he demanded, putting out his hand. "It may be that you are affected—ah, what is this?" and his face stiffened as he saw what I held in my hand.

"Oh, that!" I looked down at the ankh, and then up at him, and, for the very first time since I had known this urbane giant of a man, I saw fear on his face. "Not to worry," I muttered. "It won't hurt you. I only borrowed . . ."

"I fear it not," he growled, deep in his throat. "It is that which has been revealed to you that fills me with fear. Keep still. Let me touch it . . ." and he put his fingers to the loop, where it stuck from my fist. I could literally *see* the shock in him. "You are right," he sighed. "That is not Yalna, at all. Just a moment," and he took two cat-like steps to stand by Ferguson and whisper in his ear, to draw him back to me.

"What the devil d'you mean?" Ferguson was grumbling, irritably. "Asking me have I led a good life. How the devil can I answer . . .?"

"I will try to explain later," Hassim muttered. "For the moment, will you take this in your hand—give it to him, Chappie—and then look at your prisoner!"

Well, Ferguson let out a great hissing gasp of surprise, and almost dropped the ankh as Hassim clasped a hand over his mouth to stop him calling out. The sergeant and the matron were eyeing us with a considerable amount of suspicion, by now

"Don't say anything!" Hassim commanded, urgently. "Not here!" And he could have included me in that, because I had turned, and I was looking at Yalna again. Not a doubt about it, at all. But there was just a glimmer of an explanation filtering through my mind, as Hassim suggested we go back into the office to talk. And I must express my admiration for police training, because Ferguson sounded quite normal as he instructed the sergeant to 'keep her there, for a bit. I'll want to talk to her, in private, maybe.'

In there, with the door shut, we both looked to Hassim for an explanation. He had given the ankh back to me, and I held it as if it might be a bomb.

"Understand," he said, flatly, "that I knew nothing of this particular power, before this moment. But, having seen its effect, I must accept it. This is not the time to question 'how.' It works. It gives the holder the ability to see the truth. Will that do, for the moment?"

"Good enough for me," I admitted, and Ferguson shrugged and nodded unhappily.

"Ay . . . I'll have to accept that much. But, man, what devilish kind of a disguise is that? What is it, hallucination . . .?"

"I'd say not," I offered. "One thing struck me. Her clothes didn't change. I can't put it very well, but it wasn't her material appearance, it was as if that was Yalna's personality, somehow."

"That is just about it," Hassim nodded. "The real person—what we call the 'ka' or soul—that is one thing, but the outward appearance, the personality, is something else. It is like a screen, a mask, that one builds up throughout life, from experiences and reactions. Even the Ancient Greeks knew this, and our term, personality, derives from their word 'persona' a mask. Psychologists have documented several cases of multiple personality—as if the personality was an entity, in itself. Now—you have seen for yourselves. That girl, whoever she is, is wearing Yalna's personality." But I had gone on ahead of him, now.

"The big question," I said, "is—where are the real Yalna and Ken Wilson at this moment? While these two are masquerading in their stead, where are they?"

"Somebody will have them put away, someplace," Ferguson hazarded. "They'd have to, to make sure they didn't show up and spoil the plot."

"I wish I could believe that it is such a simple matter," Hassim growled, "but I fear it is otherwise. I know something—just a little—of the arts involved in stealing a person's living image. The one essential is that the person must die—or, more precisely, be utterly powerless to intervene. On this level, it amounts to the same thing." It chilled me, just to hear him, and I automatically rejected the thought. Ferguson, obviously, had done the same.

"Don't be too quick on that," he advised. "Let's not think along those lines until we have to. In the meantime, let's have that girl in here, and see what we can find out from her." Hassim sighed, moved across the room to put his back to the wall, to look at us.

"You'll learn nothing useful from her," he warned. "She believes herself to be Yalna Wilson. Her real identity is completely suppressed. If you succeed in questioning that, which is extremely unlikely, then you will endanger her sanity."

"But, man, we've got to try to get a line on this thing, to find out what's behind it. She must know something."

"Nothing of any worth—and need you ask who is behind this?"

"Even I can guess that," I put in, angrily. "This is the black adept, again. Who else but Rameses Ferrars would—or could—do a thing like this?"

"Yes . . ." Hassim's voice was harsh. "It is obvious, as you say. But what can be his object? There is much more here than just plain malice, the urge to injure. He must have some evil scheme in mind."

"All right!" Ferguson hit the desk with a hard hand. "I'll allow you know a sight more about the black magic side of this than me. I was hoping I'd seen the last o' that, frankly. But I'm a policeman. You leave that side of it to me, and ask the matron to bring yon lassie in, will you?" I had dropped the ankh in my pocket, for the moment, and it was positively uncanny to watch 'Yalna' come in, with the matron. She was considerably bedraggled, and she still looked wrong, like sweetness gone sour—but it was still Yalna, even though I now *knew* differently. The one thing which served to harden my resolution was the thought that this—this illusion—might be all there was left of the real girl.

"Miss Wilson!" Ferguson was officially abrupt. "Take a seat, please. D'you know who I am? Have you ever seen

either of these gentlemen before?" She gave us all a disdainful look, and shook her head.

"I may have met one or all of you, at some time. I don't remember. Does it matter? Can't it wait until the morning. I've a splitting head."

"I can well believe it. By all accounts, you worked hard enough to get it. Now listen to me. These gentlemen, and myself, we're aye good friends of your uncle, Dr. Wilson, and he's in bad trouble at this moment. The papers will make a rare fuss about this night's business, what with a man of his name and reputation. And we don't want that, now do we?" The old fraud was actually trying to wheedle her, for all his gruff manner. But he was wasting his breath on this girl.

"Oh, who cares?" she demanded. "It's a hell of a world if people can't have a bit of fun, once in a while, without the coppers interfering . . ." There came a discreet tap at the door. The matron answered it, came back to whisper in Ferguson's ear, and his mouth hardened as he listened.

"So . . ." he said. "Planning to leave the country, were you?" This got a gasp from me, and a start from Hassim, but it didn't shake her in the least.

"You make it sound like a crime," she sneered. "Yes, we are leaving the country, as you put it. We are taking a flight to Egypt, six of us. An official party. And all legal and above-board. Check with the Home Office and the British Museum, if you don't believe me. And look here, if you're as concerned as all that about our welfare, you might do something about seeing that we get some rest. I imagine we'll be up in front of the beak, in the morning—and that flight is at two-thirty in the afternoon." She glanced at the clock on the wall, pointedly, and added "Today!"

"All right!" Ferguson snapped, and made a gesture to the matron. "Take her out and see she's settled for the night." As the door clicked shut, he scraped a hard thumb-nail against his chin, and nodded at some inner thought.

"I've seen many a one like her," he murmured. "I can tell them a mile away. She's acting a part!" I confess I snorted loudly at his monumental announcement, but he grinned, craftily.

"Not so hasty, now," he cautioned. "I mean, she's trying too hard to put on the hard-drinking, hard-living flighty piece, and doing it none too well. So she's under instructions to do it.

I'd say they both are. They were deliberately out to make spectacles of themselves. Can't you see it a', in the papers? Famous Egyptologist—disgraceful scenes in night-club—that sort of thing, eh?"

"Look," I said. "If you're trying to tell us that there's a plot in hand to blacken Wilson's name, all right. I'll accept that. But, if you'll excuse me, so what? True, it's not nice. But Ken Wilson never has been one to worry too much about his social standing. He wouldn't give a damn. What I'm getting at is that the game isn't worth the candle. A steam hammer to crack a nut!"

"Then," Ferguson went on as if I hadn't spoken, "off they'll go to Egypt, and you can be sure they'll get up to some more nonsense out there." I began to boil, but Hassim gave me a cautionary sign, suddenly.

"Just what are you getting at, Inspector?"

"Well," Ferguson said, idly. "There isn't an awful lot of point in ruining the reputation and good name of—a dead man. Now is there?" And then I got it.

"I'm sorry," I said, humbly. "You're quite right. And it can only mean that they are still alive somewhere. But where?" Again there came a tap at the door, and the sergeant's questioning face. Ferguson got up, excusing himself, left us alone.

four

Hassim was thoughtful. "A good man, the Inspector," he said, gently. "His reasoning was all wrong, but his intentions were sound enough. And it is high time we did some reasonable thinking, too, instead of sinking into gloom. See, supposing we had not come into the picture as we did, what would have happened?"

"Up in court, reprimand, blaze of publicity—and then off to Egypt, I'd say. That seems to be the programme."

"Very well. If we are to do anything at all, it must be something which will not interfere with that, otherwise the black adept will know that we have taken a hand, and he will strike at us, too." This was absolutely sound, as a strategy, but, inspirationally, it was a blank.

"Whatever we do, he's bound to know," I protested. "If he doesn't know already. Through the eyes of his creatures, I mean. He's done that before."

"Not this time, I think," Hassim shook his head. "They did not recognise us, remember. But Ram Ferrars knows us well enough. What I am thinking of, now, is the way pieces of the puzzle are falling into place. As you said, reputation matters little to Kenneth. Ferrars would not go to this length just to cause a scandal. The trip to Egypt—that is an oddity." I caught the tail-end of an idea, and set away to follow it.

"Ferrars isn't popular, in Egypt, I believe. Made things a bit hot for himself, there, didn't he?"

"That is true."

"Well, then, how about this? Ferrars has some sort of urgent business there. He can't go for himself, but he discovers that Ken is going, and is using him . . .?"

"Except that Kenneth was *not* going. I would have been told. And it is significant that his trip had to wait until I returned. No, this trip is a faked-up business all through. Apart from that, though, you may be right. Ferrars has urgent need of someone to go to Egypt, and he is using Kenneth's image . . ." We could get that far, but when it came to 'what?' we were stuck. My brain felt like lumpy porridge, and I'm never at my best at 2 a.m., anyway.

Ferguson was jubilant when he came back. No sign of fatigue, there.

"Scooped the whole boiling of them," he gloated. "My men were watching, saw the big boy drive up, as large as life, straight into the flats—and there they were. Man, they had something like a quarter of a million's worth, in cash and stuff, and all red-handed. They're on their way to the Yard, right now, and that's where I ought to be, too." He paused to take a good look at us, and shrugged.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I can't attend to two things at once, much as I'd like to. I owe you a good turn, Jones. It was your smart observation that made this catch possible. But I can only do one thing at a time."

"What makes you so sure these are two separate things?" I demanded. "There are far too many coincidences here for my liking."

"Steady on, now," he soothed. "You're letting your imagination run away with you a bit. Coincidences do happen, you know . . ."

"Is there no chance that we can talk to Kenneth?" Hassim put in. "Or whoever is masquerading as he. You did say the doctor was . . ."

"Ah, I'd forgotten about that," Ferguson groped in a pocket and fished out a slip of paper. "The sergeant handed me this, and I never . . ." he broke off to give a low whistle, and stared at me. "You and your coincidences," he grunted. "This says that the man in there, whoever he is, is a long-term addict. Numerous punctures, it says. Some of considerable age. Sergeant !" he went to the door. "I think we'd better investigate the contents of 'Dr. Wilson's' pockets."

"Got 'em right here, Inspector," the sergeant said, as we followed Ferguson out into the waiting-room again. "Thought you'd want that, once you'd seen the Doc's report. Here you are. Keys, wallet, cards—and these," and he indicated a small flat case, containing a hypodermic, in pieces. And a small stack of capsules. We had no need to ask what they were. Ferguson fingered the card-case, his face dark with thought. I came close enough to be able to reach out and pick up the key-ring, making an idle gesture of it. I knew it well.

"Bide a bit !" Ferguson paused to stare at one of the cards. "You said 'coincidence,' Jones ? How about this ?" and he pushed the card across to me. It was one of Kenneth's, with the address altered, in ink, in his own writing. The Berkeley Square address.

"What of it ?" I asked, feebly. "I told you I followed the pair of them to that house. It's only natural it would be on a card, isn't it ?"

"This, here," Ferguson was flourishing another piece of paper now, from his wallet, "is a list of the names and addresses of the men we caught, tonight. And one Chakandra Bhara, a 'business man' lists this same place as *his* address. That's a bit too much of a coincidence for me. I'm thinking 'Dr. Wilson' will no' be taking any flight to Egypt for a long time. All right, Sergeant, wrap that lot up, safely, and I'll see there's a man round, to take care of those two, when we need them." He spun on us, and there was the official bark in his voice, now.

"It's out of my hands," he said. "This will all have to come out, in the proper place, and I have to warn you that you'll be required, likely, to give evidence. All right ?" he softened just a shade, looked at the clock. "It's verra late. You'll never get transport, at this time o' the morning. I'll run you home, if you like. I've my car outside."

It was a transparently obvious way of making sure that we went home and minded our own business, but there wasn't

much we could do about it, and the lift was very acceptable, anyway. It must have been just on 3 a.m. by the time he dropped us off by our gate, and went droning off into the night.

But I was far from sleepy, now. Indoors, I made straight for the phone, and dialled a number that had been burning itself into my brain for the past twenty minutes or so. I got no reply but the call-signal. And that was just what I'd hoped.

"What are you up to, Chappie?" Hassim asked, as he eyed me curiously. "Who would you be calling up, at this hour?"

"Nobody," I said. "Literally nobody. Those houses along that side of Berkeley Square are all pretty much of a pattern. Divided into flats. If the fake Ken Wilson and Mr. Business-man Bhara are sharing one of them, then they're both away from home, right? So, no answer. And I'm literally itching to have a look inside that house. Especially as I happen to have the key, right here!" and I showed him it, just as I had sneaked it from that key-ring. I felt rather proud of myself, at that moment. Up to now, the real brains of our group being out of the ring, we had been muddling along in a clumsy, ham-handed fashion, pushed by circumstances, rather than doing something positive. I wanted action.

"Just what do you have in mind?" Hassim asked, although he must have guessed most of it.

"Nothing brilliant," I admitted. "This key opens that door. I'm going in. Beyond that, I shall play it as it comes, I suppose."

"Give me ten minutes to make some preparations," he said, "and I will come, too. I have a vague idea as to what we may find, if anything."

He wouldn't say any more, but was prompt in coming downstairs again, complete with a businesslike case. And he handed me one of those double-thimble sized scramblers we had found so useful on a previous occasion.

"We need all the lucky charms we can get," I said, trying to be flippant, but he wouldn't smile.

"We may be walking into fearful danger," he muttered. "And I am not skilled enough to foresee everything. I have a few things here, but nothing any more potent than the ankh you carry in your pocket."

He got out the Rolls, and we were off, through the silent streets, with no urge to chat, at all. I fell to wondering about

the ankh. Did it confer power, the ability to see 'truth,' whatever that was? Or was it something different, an immunity to illusion? The one was potency, the other protection, but there was no way in which I could tell. Then, what about the two dupes? Where on Earth had they come from? Were they creatures of Ram Ferrars? I could still see the beautiful but bewildered face of the girl, looking as if she hadn't the faintest idea what it was all about.

We reached Berkeley Square about three-thirty and slid to a stop right outside the door, without any sign of interest from anyone. Casually as we could, we went up the steps. Hassim, by my side, flicked a pencil-beam on the door-post. There were three bells, and our man was the bottom one. 'Chakandra Bhara' on a plain white card. Ground-floor and basement, that would be. We went straight in. The little beam showed a hall. Staircase right ahead, with red carpet. Reddish-brown matting underfoot. Small table, with a mirror against the wall. Silver-grey wall-paper. All very cold and functional. Big door to our left, and another door ahead, to the left of the stairs. I tried that first door, and we went in.

Flashing the light around, we saw a telephone, some chairs, a table, a desk, some filing cabinets—all leaping at us under the darting light. Nothing important. Nobody present.

"Just a quick survey, first," I whispered. "See what there is. We can come back to this room later. Looks like a place of business." We pushed on to a bedroom, and the bathroom next to it. Still nothing. Not that we had much idea what we were looking for. We came out again, went along the hall to the second door, past the foot of the stairs. "This should lead to the basement," I guessed, and Hassim grunted assent.

"I will go first, with the light," he muttered, pushing past me.

There was a flat space, with linoleum underfoot, and then a full right turn, and stairs going down. Hassim went like a cat, the light like a slim sword in the black ahead of him. And, suddenly, the light fell. I heard it crack on the floor, saw it roll, and the thin beam scraping the dusty surface of a black carpet. Then the rush and thump of Hassim falling, heavily. And then silence. There had been no sound—not a blow, a step, a breath, nothing except the whack of the light, and the bump of the body. And there was no sound now.

Fighting the chill down the back of my neck, I stood absolutely still. Whatever had happened to Hassim, I didn't want it to happen to me. Then, gingerly, I crept back up the

stairs, groping for a light-switch. There had to be one. It would be taking a chance, to switch it on, but it was infinitely preferable to the dark down there. I found it. I knew the door at my back was shut. I clicked it over, and the light blazed up, down there in that room. I couldn't see the lamp itself, but I could see Hassim, limp and motionless. I was pretty certain he hadn't been hit by anything physical. So I groped for the little scrambler in my pocket, twisted it on, clutched it tight, and went back down the stairs. And it grew hot in my hand.

That was all the evidence I needed that we had run into a psychic screen of some kind. We were getting warm, in more senses than one. But it did nothing to lessen the danger. On the bottom step, I could see the rest of that room. I saw it, but my mind made little sense of what I saw. The walls, floor and ceiling were as velvety black as the midnight sky and inscribed with writhing designs in glittering gold, so that they seemed to dangle in mid-space. They were meaningless, twisted patterns, yet unmistakably foul. And, in the centre of the floor, there was that which made my heart stand still, painfully.

Two discs of lambent orange flame, each some six feet in diameter, were painted on the floor. At least, my staggered reason told me they were paint, although my eyes insisted they were deep pools of fire. And a spreadeagled body floated on each. Pale and naked, with arms and legs splayed like five-pointed stars, they were waxen, as in death. Over each, rising from the shimmering discs, was a rainbow-mist bubble.

The scrambler grew hot in my hand as I stared. It was the sting of it which prodded me into sanity. It was almost too hot to hold, yet if I dropped it, I would be stretched out there by Hassim. Cursing myself for a gaping yokel, I went down on my knees by him, and heaved him up. I have no clear idea of how I managed to hoist and drag him up those stairs into the room we had first found. It isn't anything I would care to do again, not in cold blood. But I got him into a chair, after a fashion, in the dark, and felt in his pockets for his scrambler, switched it on, and clasped his fingers round it. Almost at once he began to mutter and move. When I was certain he was conscious and calm again, I told him what I had seen.

"It was Ken and Yalna," I told him. "At least, it looked like them. Could have been some more of this devilish illusion business."

"No . . ." he sighed, out of the dark. "No illusion, this time. You saw all that remains of our friends." The total defeat in his voice shocked me.

"You mean, they're dead? There's nothing we can do?"

"They are not dead, in the accepted sense—yet. And there is a great deal I can do, and will do, but, when I have done it, they will be dead. And so, too, will Ram Ferrars. This time he has, indeed, sold his soul to the Evil One, and over-reached himself in so doing. He has staked his life—and he will lose it."

"Hold on a bit," I said. "I don't like the sound of that, at all. I don't know that I understand all you're talking about, but if it comes to a question of sacrificing Ken and Yalna, just to get Ferrars, then I'm against it. There's got to be some other way."

"There is none that I know of," Hassim's voice was sad, in the gloom. "I know of this conjuration, by repute, and we have the information at home by which I can take action against it. Because of the paired effect, and the globes of force, it is known as the 'Eyes of Osiris'—and Osiris, the 'judge of souls' demands his own price. There can be only a handful who know the rituals for this conjuration, and fewer still who would dare to perform it. The energies involved are enormous."

"What the devil are we to do, then? We can't just sit back and let it go on. We have to do something!"

"I have told you, I will do all that can be done. First, it will be necessary to break the projected illusion. That is the simplest part. Two for two, that is the law, here—and the pairs must stay together, within communication, or the effect is destroyed."

"All we have to do is separate those two 'fakes,' then—get them apart from each other—and they'll revert to normal?"

"That is so. They will be shocked, most probably, but the effect will soon pass. The projected energies will snap back along the twisted threads which link them to their originals, and will reinforce the screens which hold Kenneth and Yalna prisoned. Ferrars, given the chance and the circumstances, could project their images again, of course. But he will not have the time, or the chance."

"You mean—you're going to break down the spell?"

"Yes. It will take study and preparation—and, if I succeed, the powers will be unleashed to strike back at Ferrars, and destroy him."

"If you succeed? You mean—you might fail?"

"It is a chance that must be faced, yes. I am not as expert as Kenneth and even he would admit that there is great care needed here."

"And, if you fail, what then?"

"Then," he said, flatly, "the released energies will recoil on me, and I shall be destroyed. And there will be an end to all of us." But I just couldn't accept that, at all.

Apart from the fact that it left me strictly outside, with a watching brief, I just couldn't calmly contemplate the fact that all three of them would be wiped out, in a mad attempt to smash Ram Ferrars. Of course, I was as keen to hit at him as they were. He had encumbered the Earth far too long. But not this way, not at this price.

"Isn't there some way of doing it, and standing a chance of getting Ken and Yalna back?" I demanded. "Any way, no matter how remote?"

"The only way the Eyes of Osiris can be broken, to release the victims whole," he said slowly, "is if he who set up the web should sacrifice himself in their place. The price must be paid, and the price is life!"

Well, that was that, sure enough. I couldn't see the black adept sacrificing himself like that, in a million years. The more I thought about it, the more I saw how viciously we were trapped. We could take action, right enough, but we were stuck with the fact that if we did, we destroyed our friends—and very likely ourselves into the bargain. I say 'ourselves' because I was determined on one thing, if nothing else. I was going to be involved in anything that had to be done. Which-ever way you looked at it, the whole rotten business was my fault, in the first place. I was deep in self-castigation as the telephone rang.

I must have lifted a good inch out of my chair with the shock, and then I groped for the instrument, which I could just make out, in the first creaking grey of dawn. I picked it up and held it to my ear, not saying a word.

"Is that you, Jones?" Unmistakeably, it was Ferguson's voice.

"How the blazes did you know I was here?" I muttered, and he gave a rough chuckle.

"Do me a bit of credit," he said. "I've good eyes. I saw you swipe that key, and I figured I knew what you'd be doing

with it. You'd never make a crook. Your face is too honest. But mind me. I thought you'd better know. The gang we picked up have been screaming for their rights—and there's a legal body on his way to where you are, this minute. Some nonsense about sealing the place up before the police can get in and fake the evidence. That's give you a notion of the kind of law they have in mind. But you'd better not be there when he arrives, else it'll look bad."

You may be sure we lost no time in getting out of the house and into the car, but I can't say we were very cheerful as we rode home. It did occur to me to wonder what the legal gentleman would think, when he explored the basement room.

"He will not see what we saw," Hassim told me, heavily. "I do not know just what he will see, but it will be something quite innocent. It is only such as we who are blessed, or cursed, with the power to see the evils in this case. That is why we cannot look for help from anyone else. Even the Inspector, who is a good friend, can see only as much as we tell him to look for, and not always then . . .

I hardly heard him. It was well after four in the morning, and the new day was watering the dark night with chill blue. All the stresses of the past hours seem to catch up on me, all at once. I vaguely remember climbing out of the car, and shambling upstairs. I did undress and climb into bed, although I have no memory of it. I know I did this, because I was undressed, and in bed, when I woke up.

five

The sun was slanting in at the window at an angle which said, automatically, 'early morning.' That surprised me, mildly, because I had the strong impression that I'd slept a long time. And I'd had a hell of a dream. I sat up urgently, as it echoed in my mind, and then felt foolish, for there were three people there, standing, looking at me. Hassim, Ferguson, and a total stranger.

"Something wrong?" I mumbled, stupidly, and the sunlight caught my eyes. Shading them with a hand, I said, "Funny, I could swear I've been asleep for hours. But it can't be more than seven-thirty, by the sun."

"This is Sunday," Hassim said, gently. "You have slept the clock round, but I doubt whether it has refreshed you very much." Then I realised that I ached all over and was soaked with sweat. And that fitted, too.

"I've had a dream," I said. "The weirdest dream ever—if it was a dream." Then I caught myself, and looked again at the stranger. "You'll excuse me being blunt," I said, "but who the devil are you?" He was medium-tall, thick-set, about forty-ish, dark haired with wisps of grey at the temples, and a hag-ridden look. I imagined he'd been handsome, once, but was now showing the lines and bags of a man who has lived too much too fast.

"You've seen him before," Ferguson grunted. "You were following him about, remember? Arthur Cheyney's the name. He was impersonating Wilson. That's only one of the charges. There's a whole string more. Said he wanted to see you, as a favour. All right, Cheyney, say what you have to say. I haven't got all day."

"Wanted to thank you, Mr. Jones," Cheyney's voice was rough-edged, and, all at once, I couldn't blame him. "I've been in some bad corners, and done some bad things—and I've paid for them, as I reckon I'll pay for this one—but I've never been in anything like that last lot. It's a wonder I'm not stark staring mad, right now. I reckon I owe you something, for being the one to get me out of that, and if there's ever anything I can do—well, you just ask, that's all."

"After you come out," Ferguson commented, caustically. "Which won't be for a good while." Again I felt a twinge of sympathy for Cheyney, but there was something I wanted to ask him, something that was very fresh in my mind.

"When you were 'doubling,'" I said, "what sort of a sensation was it?" I saw a shudder shake him, and went on, "Let me guess. Was it anything like being trapped inside a great big box, in the dark, with strange voices shouting at you—and you feeling about so big?" I held up a finger and thumb, close together. He nodded. For a moment, I thought he was going to be sick. Then Ferguson led him off, leaving Hassim to stand and stare at me, curiously.

"I look forward to hearing your dream," he rumbled, "but you must hasten and dress for breakfast, because we have quite a lot to tell you." That made me mildly curious, but it didn't prepare me for the shock I had when I went down to the dining

room. Another stranger, but one I recognised at once. She looked immensely more presentable than she had done before. Her short-sleeved, paper-white blouse gave her skin a golden glow and struck lights from her hair. Long, waving to her shoulder, it looked heavy and glossy, like coppery gold and made her eyes seem startlingly blue and wide. There was a lurking hint of fear there, too, so I went straight across to her, with my hand out.

"I know who you are, anyway," I said. "And I'm very pleased to be able to see you as you really are. Is Ferguson going to whip you off to clink, as well, or are you staying to breakfast—I hope?" She managed an uncertain smile.

"I'm staying. You don't mind?"

"Why should I? So far as I can tell, you didn't exactly enjoy doing what you had to do."

"It was horrible," she whispered, "and I have you to thank for saving me from something even worse, Mr. Jones."

"That's the second time I've heard that inside ten minutes," I grinned. "It makes me feel strange . . ."

"But you did save my life!"

"I wasn't thinking that. It's this 'Mr. Jones' business. My well-meaning parents christened me 'Chapman'—I answer to Chappie much more readily."

"I am Anna Bjorn," she said, in a very small voice, as if she didn't quite know how to take this. I couldn't blame her, but I felt too light-headed to care much.

"You can forget the life-saving business," I told her. "I didn't do anything very wonderful, I assure you. Nothing that wouldn't have been crashingly obvious to anyone else in my shoes. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to have breakfast. I have the traditional appetite of the condemned man, this morning."

"As a jest, that is hardly in good taste," Hassim said, sternly, but I didn't care for him, either, not now.

"It wasn't a jest, believe me. Never more serious in my life. But, leave that for the moment. Bring me up to date on what's happened, while I've been away."

Hassim told me, briefly, and with little emotion. He had been very busy indeed, since Saturday morning. For a start, he'd gone direct to Sir Cyril Coke, the Assistant Commissioner, who owed us a favour or two. Then wheels had turned, with good effect. First, the masqueraders had been forcibly

separated, enough to break the illusion. Then, with two shocked and frightened people as extra evidence, and some stout work from Ferguson, the authorities had been persuaded to see that there was funny business going on. The press pictures had not come out clearly enough to be worth anything in the way of recognition. Discreet 'leakages' had set the newshounds in full cry after the 'drug-ring' story, and the 'imposture' of Dr. Wilson and his niece had somehow faded into the background.

"The minor matters have been cleared up," Hassim concluded, "leaving us free to concentrate on the major problem. I have been able to make certain preparations, but there is still much to do. I shall need your assistance."

"Ah, now," I said, emptying my cup and sitting back. "This is where we're in for a bit of argument, I fancy. Let me put it this way. You're going to have a stab at breaking down the 'Eyes of Osiris,' to reverse the power, and make the whole thing bounce back on Ram Ferrars, and finish him off. That, incidentally, is an object I'm very much in favour of. But, if and when you do, Ken and Yalna will die . . ."

"It is what they would have wished," Hassim objected, "and it is unavoidable."

"And what is more, you stand a very good chance of eliminating yourself at the same time." At this, Anna gave a gasp.

"You didn't tell me about that part," she said, reproachfully and Hassim shrugged. And then looked at me, searchingly.

"You act strangely," he said. "There is something about you . . ."

"You bet there is," I said. "It's just this. You're not going to crack the spell, at all. I am!" And he frowned hugely.

"What can you do?" His voice was deep and thick with scorn. Then he added, very quickly, "I do not wish to offend, Chappie, but this is a task which calls for a great deal of training, and knowledge. You can't be serious?"

"I am, though. Look, I've had all I want of that plate. Let's sit in comfort, and I'll tell you." And, as soon as I'd settled into my favourite big chair and got a cigarette going, I told them my dream. It was no trouble at all to recall.

"It started," I said, "with the awareness that I was asleep—and that somebody was calling me. Somebody a devil of a long way off, and screaming his head off at me, but I could only just

hear. It was Ken Wilson, and he wasn't calling for help, but crying encouragement. There was something I had to do. For a moment, I couldn't think what. Then I realised that I was shrimp-sized, and squashed inside something huge like an ant in a barrel of treacle, in a way. But not like that, because I was responsible for the barrel, and the treacle, too." I saw Anna go pale, and stare.

"You know the feeling, I think?" I said, and she nodded.

"Well," I went on, "I knew, then, that what I had to do was to fight my way out of this trap. And it was a fight. I felt myself growing, swelling, and something had to give—me, or the confinement. Then, all at once, there was something like a silent explosion, and an organised ripping, tearing feeling—and then I was away, like a bubble from a diver's helmet. A weird feeling.

"I could see all round me. I got a brief flash of my bedroom the house, this quarter of London, then the whole of the south of England—as quick as it takes to tell—and I thought 'Lord, this is it. I'm dead! I've died in my sleep, and I'm on my way! I remember feeling sorry for the rest of you, because, already, I had the most wonderful feeling of freedom. I don't think I've ever realised, before, just what freedom really means. I could still hear Wilson's voice, calling me on. And I had a bit of worry, too, about just where I was bound. It didn't seem right that I was on my way to Heaven, just like that. Didn't feel qualified. You know? Does this all sound mad?"

Hassim said nothing, his bronzed face quite blank. But Anna was leaning forward, now, intent, and a gleam in her eyes I realised, all over again, that she was a very beautiful young woman. It gave me a pang.

"I had better warn you against disappointment. Maybe I was on my way to the happy lands, but I never got there. All at once I knew that I had stopped, that Ken Wilson was there, and Yalna. I could feel them. After a while, I could see them, as a semi-visible essence, the way ghosts are supposed to look. But they were quite at ease. Happy. And the urgency, the calling was all over. It was the same kind of atmosphere we've often had, right here in this room, just sitting round discussing things, impersonally. And that's what we did."

"What manner of things did you discuss?" Hassim demanded, and there was a slight edge to his voice.

"We talked about this whole problem, from all angles. For instance, I can tell you, now, what Ferrars was, and is, after. He believes there is an 'object of power' to be found in the Abu Simbel region. More accurately, it is one half—and he has the other half, already. With the whole object paired he will have power the like of which this weary old world has never seen. I got the impression that nuclear energy is a feeble flicker in comparison."

"Did the shade of Kenneth tell you the name of this object?" There was definite doubt in Hassim's voice, now.

"That's a point. He said it had no name, or, more accurately, it was called 'The Thing without a Name.'"

". . . which was, in the beginning, when light and dark were one . . ." Hassim sighed, obviously quoting. "I have heard of it. Please go on."

"All right. Now, Ken explained to me just how to go about stopping Ferrars, once and for all. And he has got to be stopped. I mean, that's the most important item, above all else. Such a thing as a few Earthly lives, well, they seemed to matter very little. It was the feeling of freedom which did that. It made everything else seem academic. The way he explained it to me, to stop Ferrars, to blast him with his own toy, someone has to be sacrificed. Your way would mean the death of Kenneth, Yalna—and most likely yourself. His way, which he explained, was slightly different. If the operator—me, in this case—was willing, he could exchange for Ken Wilson. Ideally, with two operators, male and female, we could both exchange, for Ken and Yalna."

"Kenneth suggested *that*?"

"Lord, no! It was just a datum which came up, and we weighed it, quite impartially. And the answer was pretty obvious. Kenneth outweighs me, in value, on any kind of test. To get him back, alive and well, in place of me—is a gain, in anybody's eyes. No argument, there. So that's it. I'm going to go through the mill. I've been coached, by Ken. You'll be the operator, here, to do whatever is necessary. And, if we pull it off, you'll have Ken Wilson back, safe and sound, in my place."

Well, Hassim didn't like it one little bit, but he couldn't argue on any solid ground. What he did try to do was challenge the authenticity of the dream, by asking me a lot of searching questions, chiefly about colours, and what I'd been told to do,

in the ritual, and that sort of thing. My answers must have been satisfactory, for he shrugged, sadly, at last, and agreed with my way of it. I think what bothered him was that I should be making a sacrifice of myself to save Ken Wilson, for these two were closer than brothers. But it wasn't like that at all. I'd had one taste of 'life' away from the body, and that was enough to convince me that death was nothing to be afraid of, at all. Then Anna chipped in.

"I've been listening. I have not understood everything, I'm afraid, but I do get the general feeling. I am worried, a little, that you would do such a thing, such a deadly dangerous thing, on the strength of what is nothing more than a vivid dream, but Mr. Hassim seems to be convinced that it was genuine. There is another point, though, that you haven't mentioned. You will die, so that Dr. Wilson will live. The girl, Yalna, she will die, too, and both of you will be together, in the 'heaven' you have described. I do not put it very well . . ."

"You've got it all wrong, I'm afraid," I told her, gently. "There was a time when I'd have said that I was in love with Yalna, and she with me, but that dream showed me differently. On that level, things seem a lot clearer, easy to understand. And she is, I can see now, a different kind of person from me, altogether. Love, the way I would feel it, the way I *did* feel it, in fact, would be a selfish, possessive, personal thing. That's pretty common, and it doesn't sound very wonderful, but that's the way I am, and there's no point in trying to hide it, now. But her nature is on a different level altogether. There would still be positive and genuine affection and respect, of course. I'd do anything for her. And, if this thing comes off, I'd hope to 'meet' her again, but she would be in a different department, in a way of speaking. This is a damned difficult thing to explain in cold blood, but I think you know what I mean."

"I think I do," she leaned forward, a wrinkle on her forehead. "You said, I think, that this thing should be done 'au pair.' Does that mean, if you could find a woman willing to sacrifice herself, along with you, that both your friends would be rescued?" I nodded, and had words already in my mouth before I caught her drift. And then it all seemed different.

"You can't do that!" I protested. "Not you! Hang it all, you've got everything to live for. You're young, beautiful . . ." and I would have gone on, but she checked me with a slim hand.

"You think so? I know different. I am a failure. I have been a model, an actress, a show-girl, a dancer—and not very good at any of them. I am too much 'me' to be dedicated to anything else, to give my life to a 'thing.' I have not enough talent to be good at anything, not enough courage to face the rest of my life being a nobody . . ." and she was cutting the ground out from under my feet with every word, because I'd been through all this myself.

"You'll get used to it, in time," I objected, foolishly. "I know how it is, because it's happened to me, too."

"But that is just the point," she caught me like a flash, "you are going to do something worthwhile with your life, now. All I'm asking is the chance to do the same with mine. Take me with you, please!" It was a facer. I knew all the arguments in favour, having used them myself, but I couldn't think of a single valid objection, except that I didn't like the idea. I began to have an idea of how Hassim must feel. And he wouldn't help at all.

"I may not interfere," he rumbled. "You have assured me that Kenneth did not try to persuade you to sacrifice yourself. Had you told me otherwise, I would not have believed you, for it is not the right way. A step like this must be taken of a free will and a clear self-purpose."

"All right," I said, to Anna. "If this is what you really want." And that was that. But it added a good bit to the load I was carrying, to the awareness of just how many people were hanging on me. Because I *could* fail. All I had was a set of instructions, given to me in a particularly vivid dream! And the ankh. I had it in my pocket. Somehow, the thing had become important to me, and I hated to be very far from it. I got it out, to let Anna see it, and, whether she felt it or not, there was an instant of electric tension in the room—as I held it out to her. I know I held my breath, and I suspect Hassim was doing the same. She took it, held it, and looked at us.

"It's very old," she said, in a whisper, "and kind—just like you."

"So be it!" Hassim sighed. "Come—we have much to do . . ."

It was late afternoon before we were finally ready. The ritual rehearsals, the bathing and cleansing, the setting up of the diagram-fields, all had kept us pretty busy. Ferguson had rung up, once, to tell us that he was busy on a tack of his own,

trying to forge the links between Ram Ferrars and the drug-ring. It was a pleasant feeling, to know that we had friends of that calibre, and reassuring, also, to know that the cards were gradually being stacked against the enemy, on all sorts of levels. But there was precious little for the Inspector to go on.

Cheyney had no sort of back-trail at all, was just another of the countless thousands of addicts who skulk clear of police notice. Anna, however willing, could give little help. She had answered an advertisement, had been told to meet a taxi at a certain spot in the town, had been handed a sealed note by the taxi-driver. And she had entered the taxi, opened the note and, presumably, read it—but, after that point, all was an incoherent nightmare. It was precious little to go on.

As Hassim said, "It will not be enough, for us, until we see Ferrars dead and *know* him to be dead—finished. Nothing less than that will do."

Anna was marvellous. There isn't any other word for it. A mind like a razor for biting right through to the essentials, and she caught almost everything the very first time, taking all sorts of odd developments in her stride. As I'd never visualised anyone with me on this suicide bid, I hadn't foreseen one or two possible items of awkwardness. For instance, the insistence on cleansing. We had both to be absolutely free of any mundane connections—which meant we had to be stripped to the skin. But she just accepted that and said no more about it. I suppose having been a model helped. And, too, we had far too many other things to think about to have time to dwell on conventions. After all, they were part of the world we were about to leave behind.

We ended up in the laboratory room, upstairs, in the far third, where we could be effectively insulated and shielded. On the aseptic white floor, Hassim had drawn, with great care, two pentacles, in gold. They were insurance. The forces I was going to tamper with were too dangerous to touch without first taking every precaution. The white walls and ceiling were a further barrier, and Hassim was even now running up the generator which would amplify the shielding field, once we were clear. There were just the two of us—and gloomy dark all around.

"I'm nervous, now," she confessed, looking up at me.

"Me, too," I admitted. "In fact I'm scared stiff. But that's natural, isn't it? It isn't every day that one deliberately arranges to die, even if we do think there's something very pleasant waiting for us. All right, ready?" and she nodded, got down, and stretched herself out inside her diagram. I did likewise, making sure that the ankh was close by my head. "This is it, then," I said. "It's been nice to know you—pity it couldn't have been sooner—but we'll talk about that later."

I heard her murmur 'goodbye,' and then I lay quite still. It was a strangely defenceless position to be in. The glaring overhead light winked out, and all was dark. Only the noise of the generator, booming faintly. I was about to die. It wasn't anything I'd thought much about, before, and certainly had never envisaged quite like this. I thought of the dream—and wondered if it *was* true, after all.

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Then, all at once, I had collapsed, the way a bubble bursts, leaving just a little drop of water. I was a speck, struggling in a vast and viscous sea which clogged my movements and threatened to drown me. Again I heard the call, the encouragement, and I began to struggle, desperately. 'Become what thou art,' the stern command seemed to reverberate through the immensity of nothingness. Darkness which grew grey, and a swelling struggle that was self-destructive—like Aesop's frog, who puffed himself up so much that he burst—into screaming, white-hot pain, for one flash. Then I was free. The impulse to shoot up and away from it all was well-nigh irresistible. But what of Anna?

The grey mist cleared, and I could see both of us, far below and quite still, like ugly, clumsy white slugs. And I could see her, struggling to break out, as a mirror-image might try to break the glass surface. I reached down to help, and felt the bite of the pain again, but steeled myself to hold on. Then we were together and the pain, the misery, the dull and heavy 'real' world fell away from us. This, now, was even more wonderful than the dream had been, much more than any words can describe. And Anna, too, was different, was a glowing radiance. In that instant, I knew her, in a way that one never knows a person, in the body. In that moment, the thought that we had a sworn duty to perform, that we had to turn back,

if only to a small degree, was positively unpleasant. I am not ashamed to admit that I hesitated, that it was an effort to turn back, to go 'down' again.

But we went. It was a plunging down into greyness becoming ever darker, with the 'feel' of a countless host of others all round, spinning and whirling like dead leaves in a wind. As we went further down, so it became thicker, heavier and more distasteful, like a bad smell. Then, afar off in the gloom, we saw two glowing points, like baleful eyes, staring, and the beam from them was chill, and frightening. Anna's touch merged closer to me as we willed to go forward, and the dim, swirling host of 'others' scattered before our advance. As those ghostly watchers divined our intentions, they fled, wailing like the winds of winter around an empty house. We came close.

There, beyond the fiery veils, we saw the two we had come for, and could feel the steady, strong pulse of their life-force. Anna and I hesitated, and it was as if we took each other by the hand, just for a moment of reassurance, and then we were ready. In our minds, in unison, we built up the ritual structures we had rehearsed so painstakingly with Hassim. And then we hurled ourselves at those twin spheres of energy. There was an instant, blinding flare of light, a stunning but soundless explosion, and I felt myself tossed like a helpless chip adrift on a boiling sea, spinning over and over. All alone. And afraid.

"Chappie!" That voice, one I had never hoped to hear again, called me back to reality, firmly but with kindness, and I opened my eyes and sat up—on a green grassy bankside, in brilliant sunshine. There, sitting on a boulder, not a yard from me, and smiling, was Ken Wilson. As solid, as real-looking as he had ever been, but wearing a coarse, white-bleached woollen robe. I shook my head, blinked my eyes, and realised that I was similarly dressed—then things 'rippled,' somehow, just for a second—and Anna was sitting by my side, and Yalna just over there, by Ken. They, also, were in white-wool robes. Something classical, I thought.

"All's well, so far," he said. "Listen carefully. I must be quick, as we have little time. First, thank you, both of you, for coming back for us. I can guess what it must have cost you. Second—no, this is not real, as usually meant. This is an illusory reality. I am holding it. The setting is Ancient Greece—Athenian Greece at its greatest. Possibly the human mind has never before, nor since, come so close to absolute sanity,

or been so free of false belief. This environmental frame, in itself, is a strength, a shield. Ram Ferrars will find it, and us. He will break it down. He must attack and try to destroy us. My purpose is to bleed him of power, by a series of such illusions, until we are compelled to meet him face to face. I am keeping the energies of the Eyes of Osiris in reserve against that time. Now, I think that takes care of the essentials."

"How can we help?" Anna asked, and Wilson smiled again, nodding.

"I regret we never met," he said, "but I am proud to know you now. You're a valiant spirit. You can help, enormously, by being as 'real' as possible. Don't try to take in any great external detail, just concentrate on yourself, feel solid and personal."

"Try not to be too objective," Yalna put in, gently. "Check over yourself, as a way of beginning. Are you really as beautiful as you seem, now?"

"You're very kind," Anna smiled. "I can see, now, why Chappie was so fond of you . . ." and I would have protested at this, in my embarrassment, but Wilson checked me.

"Let them . . ." he said. "It is good reality, for them. The feminine mind."

"What happens when we run out of illusions?" I asked, and he grew thoughtful.

"I cannot tell, frankly. Ferrars will try everything he can think of, and we must be ready for anything and everything."

"Why four of us?" I asked, still curious. "Wouldn't it have been easier to be on your own? Or is this a help?"

"It helps. Difficult to explain, but four personalities, each contributing actively, make a stronger web than if those same four were united into one . . ." and the solid ground beneath us heaved and jarred. The sky grew dark and thunderous, and huge, jagged edged rocks came bounding down the hillside.

"So soon?" he said, frowning, and put out his hand, commandingly. "When I say 'Now'—let go, all of you. Ready? Now!" and I fell into black dark that bleached, quickly, into swirling grey—and I was sitting on a bollard, on a quayside, with the creak of boats, the whip of a salt breeze and the mew of seagulls in my ears. There was the clack and chatter of strange, cheery voices. Again, I saw Wilson, now bronzed and leather-kilted, with a short hanging sword and a stern face. Then I glanced either side, seeing Anna and

Yalna—and I *knew* where this was, by their unmistakeable costumes. Minoan Crete—and there was the palace of Minos, up above us there, on the hill, the ships of the Mycenae all about us in the harbour.

"He is more strong than I had imagined," Wilson sighed. "To find and break the illusion so easily."

"Maybe if we had known what you were doing, beforehand, we could have helped?" I suggested, but he shook his head.

"A co-operative illusion takes time and training, and half-reality is worse than none. The real difficulty is that there are so few places I can conjure up in which the advantage is with us. I could set us down in Ancient Egypt, for instance, in any one of several dynasties, but Ferrars would be more at home there than I am. There are very few places, or times, in this old world, where safety is paramount."

The breeze from the sea was brisk, with a bite in it. Looking at the two girls, which was exceedingly easy to do, I thought how ill-adapted the scanty Cretan costume was to chill winds, possibly why it has never been tried in Britain. They have tried just about everything else.

"Bit of a storm blowing up," I commented, with an eye to the piling clouds.

"Yes," he sighed. "Not my storm, either. We shall have to move again."

There was another instant of disruption, and we were in Rome, but it was a Rome such as the world hasn't seen for two thousand years. We stood at the foot of a great white pillar, before a mighty building in white stone. A rough, polyglot crowd shoved and jabbered round us.

"I am losing ground," Wilson murmured, at my elbow. "We shall have to meet him head on, soon."

"Would it help if we separated?" I asked, anxiously, but he shook his head.

"We cannot *be* separated, now. We four are as one, even if we do retain memories of identity . . ." and it struck me, suddenly, that the two women were strangely silent. Anna looked pale and ill. I reached out to steady her, and my hand went clear through the space where she had been. She winked out like a shadow, and I spun on Wilson in alarm, but before he could say anything there was a sudden shout from a part of the milling crowd.

"Make way! Make way!" and a frantic scrambling as the populace fought to get clear of the striding, slashing, hard-faced lictors. Unheeding, they came on, whipping a clear way for the chariot which followed. My eyes went to the man who stood there, the reins wrapped about one arm. He was old and bitter with much evil, his black eyes daggering directly at us.

"There!" he cried, pointing an accusing arm. "Those three. Seize them!"

"He dares to come in person, now," Wilson muttered. "We must move again. Ready? Now!" and the shouting died away. We were under a blistering sun, with rolling sand reaching out to the horizon in all directions. We trudged, steadily. No Anna?

"Her image has faded," Wilson answered my unspoken question, "but her power is still with us. I think Yalna is almost gone, too." She did, indeed, look utterly worn. At a sign from him, she gave a nod from beneath her white burnoose—and vanished like a puff of smoke.

"Just you and I, now, Chappie—and we can *really* lead him a dance." I was beginning to get some idea of what Wilson was up to, now. We were stretching Ferrars to the breaking point in his efforts to find and destroy us. But, as I saw the tall pillar of angry red dust, the sandstorm which howled its fury across the desert at us, I realised, also, that the Evil One was far from being spent. The harsh gritty dust bit into our nostrils, choking and strangling before we could shift again, out of it.

This time the wrench was sudden and painful, and we were in Old Egypt, down on our knees before the great Sphinx. It loomed above us, mighty and menacing, its great paw of solid stone raised and descending to smash us to jelly.

"Oh no you don't!" Wilson snapped, and we jerked out—and were in hot, steamy jungle, up to our knees in slime and weeds.

"He's devilish quick," Wilson sighed. "That Egypt was his, not mine. He very nearly had us, that time."

"Is there some pattern to all this shifting about?" I wondered, struggling through the dragging mud. "I mean, if there is, I can't see it. Couldn't we be somewhere comfortable, for a change?"

"Comfort has little to do with it. I am picking randomly, and the more unlikely each frame of reference is, the more time and effort it takes for him to find us, and then break in—" a sudden thrashing in the slime interrupted him. We turned, to see spreading ripples, twin bumps of eyes, and the great grinning jaws of a crocodile. Again the snap and jerk, and we were in blazing sun, again, but this time up to our shoulders in grass, with white clouds scurrying overhead. Somewhere close by, a lion coughed and snarled, and there was a thrashing sound as it quested for us.

"The lion isn't mine, nor was the crocodile," Wilson shook realistic sweat out of his eyes. "He's right on our heels, all the time. There's a moral lesson in all this, Chappie, if you've time for it, that there are very few secure places in life, either in reality or in our imagination." The lion roared, thunderously. "Here we go again," he snapped, and I sank back, thankfully, in the deep comfort of an armchair.

Looking round, I saw a scene I knew quite well. This was the Globetrotter's Club, where I'd met Kenneth, more than once, while we were just friends out of Service memories, before we became so intimately involved in each other's affairs. He sat opposite me, smiling, but the strain was obvious on his face.

"This should hold him for a while," he said. "It's my last 'real' place. After this, we will more or less have to meet him on his own ground. I must say, though, you've done remarkably well, Chappie, to have lasted so long. You've helped, a great deal."

That remark, as it sank in, gave me a bit of a turn. Up until then it hadn't occurred to me that I was just a shade in his projections—and, that just like the two girls, I would snap out and become an entity in his controlling mind, when the time came. Anna and Yalna were still 'with' us, but as a feeling, an awareness. And that was slated for me, soon. It was logical, and I was already dead, anyway, but it was a nasty thought, just the same. I felt real. I hated the thought of just ceasing to be. Wilson must have known how I felt, for he smiled.

"You'll still be here, still be present, just as Yalna and Anna are. Four minds against one. Four minds with the strength of four, but the speed and direction of one. And, as Ferrars knows only too well, we have the power of his spell—the Eyes in reserve against him. He has no defence against that."

"Sorry if I'm thick," I said, "but, if we have this weapon, why don't we use it? Why not hit him with it, right away?"

"Because," he said, "I must be absolutely sure I have him, and not one of his creatures. You know, because I have told you, that Ferrars always works through a tool, a puppet of some kind. Of himself, he is almost helpless. I don't want to be misled into striking at one of his pawns. I want *him*!" That made good sense, so I accepted it. I could feel Anna, now, warm in my mind. And strong, too.

"There's one other thing," I hesitated. "I'd had the idea that Anna and myself would be out of it, as soon as we had broken the Eyes. I mean—that was the idea, to leave the way clear for you and Yalna to—go back . . .?"

"That was typical of you," Wilson smiled, "and it is one way. But Yalna and I considered the thing and we rejected it. The mere idea of sacrifice, however voluntary, was unpleasant. So we decided it was all, or nothing—all four of us, or none. We think too much of you, Chappie, and the lovely girl you have found, to count such a sacrifice as being good."

Which made me feel pleased, but uncomfortable. I looked round the club-room. It was convincingly real, and somnolently quiet, until a hushed chatter caught my attention. Over there, by the door, came one of those modern, highly complicated wheel-chairs, pushed by a blank-faced, coloured man-servant. The man in the chair was little and old, shrivelled and white-haired, a robe across his knees, and his eyes hidden by dark glasses. I got the unreasonable, uncomfortable feeling that there were keen eyes studying me from behind those glasses. Until I caught Wilson's murmur.

"It's old Bannerman. An amazing old chap. In his eighties, I believe, and almost helpless. Quite blind. Has the use of his hands, but very little else. And yet he still travels—all over the world. Precious few places he hasn't been, and can talk about. We don't often see him, here. I'll call him over. He's well worth talking to, and it will help strengthen the illusion." He made a faint sign to the servant, who nodded and pointed the wheel-chair in our direction.

Now, for the life of me, I don't know what made me think of the ankh just then, unless it was some stray thought of 'seeing' what lay beneath those dark glasses. At any rate, no sooner did I think of it, than it was in my hand. Feeling a trifle guilty I dropped my hand out of sight, glanced across at Bannerman

—and my stomach churned at sight of the foul and loathsome 'thing' that squatted in that chair. The aura of malevolence was a putrid stench. The glittering evil in those hate-red eyes was a dagger, aimed at Wilson. I struggled to call out. I knew, sickeningly, that this was Ferrars, in person, but my tongue was paralysed. Then a writhing claw-hand slid from beneath the robe, clutching something that burned with green fire lancing out at Wilson. He had time for just one shocked cry and then the whole illusion winked out, was shattered into formless dark. As I fell, headlong, into nothingness, I 'heard' Ken Wilson's despairing apology.

" . . . a blind fool. I never suspected old Bannerman. I have failed you all . . . "

" Hold on a bit," I called out, desperately. " I feel as if I'm still functioning or whatever you'd call it," and there was a timeless moment. Then a wave of hope.

" By the Fates—you are still in existence ! There is a chance, yet. Fight him, Chappie. Fight him. We will be with you ! "

Which was all very nice—but how ? Give me arms and legs, and an adversary I can see and I'll fight, if I have to. But I didn't even know how to begin, here. Fight ! The word gonged and rhymed, ridiculously. Fight—bright—knight—knight-in-armour—and I was a knight, in glittering armour, which was Wilson, on a high-stepping white mare, which was Anna, clutching a long lance, Yalna. And there, across the green turf, thundering towards me, was a monstrous black knight. I set my lance, began to gallop to meet him, and the earth shook to the pounding. As if to the manner born, I tilted the lance at the last moment, shifting my point from his shield to his visor. Caught him fair and square as his shaft shattered on my shield. The impact set me back in the saddle, and my steed back on its haunches, but he was down and struggling to rise. I spurred forward. The lance became a shining sword, singing in my grip, slicing down—and the black knight spat a stream of fire and smoke, snarled and dissolved into a writhing, hissing dragon.

" Ignore it," my armour whispered. " The fire cannot harm you." I rode into the swirling murk, swinging my sword in great sweeps, but meeting nothing but smoke. Then my mare reared up and stumbled as a huge serpent wrapped its coils round her legs. I threw myself off, heavily, and a loop of that constricting body flung itself crushingly round me. I lashed

out, wildly, saw the sword-edge bite into that squirming body, and the great snake jerked, convulsively, dwindled, became a great bird that squawked about my head, pecking and beating with its pinions, stabbing with a murderous beak. To a quick hint from Anna, I too became a bird, a mighty falcon, whirling high, to turn and swoop on my enemy. He fled, dropped, blurred and became a crouched and snarling tiger.

The other minds within mine were jubilant, now. I became a massive bull-elephant, stamping the spitting cat into the dust—and it blurred and shifted to become a tall Nubian in a loin-cloth, with a bow. Now I needed no telling that Ram Ferrars was slipping, had made his first real mistake. I could match him, man for man, any time, and a kind fate had blessed me with a 'real' physique that dwarfed his. In an instant, we were breast to breast in a rib-cracking, life-or-death clutch, and I could feel his back bending in my grip. The feral red eyes burning into mine glowed with hate, but I was unheeding. I had him, this time. His dark face twisted, the breath scraped in his throat, and the cords stood out on his neck like finger-thick cables. Another second and his back would have snapped up like a dry stick—and he was gone again. Like a wraith.

I stood for a moment, breathless and bewildered. Around me it was night, and half-wild countryside. A chill wind stroked my bare skin and the grass was wet to my feet. Then, as I stared, I picked out landmarks, saw faint sky-glow and heard the distant rush of occasional traffic, and I knew where I was, although I could scarcely believe it. This was nothing more exotic than Wimbledon Common, and it was real in a way that none of the other locations had been. I had a momentary qualm as to what might happen, should some innocent passer-by come upon me, stark naked, on the Common at this time of night. Then the wonder washed away as a strange compulsion took me, set me striding forward.

I went along a root-ragged path, through bushes, treading on stones, here and there, making me wince, but keeping straight on—to a wall, a gate, a garden, a lawn—up to French windows, half-ajar, to stand on the threshold of a room that was thick with evil. The carpet, the walls and ceiling, were midnight black and the lighting was an awful blood-red. By a desk, opposite me, stood that wheel-chair, and, crouched in it, the wizened, crooked figure of 'Bannerman'. But now the dark glasses were discarded, along with the white wig, and those

eyes were the same feral red that I had stared into, in my struggle with the Nubian. They burned at me, now, under a dome-like bald skull.

"This is the moment," Wilson's thought surged up in my mind. "This is Ferrars as he really is. Strike now. I will deliver the power to your hand," and strange, meaningless, mind-twisting syllables came to me as I raised my right hand. But the thing that was Ferrars spat venomously, made a warding-off gesture, and the object in his grasp shone like a small sun. I could feel power swell up in me, tingling, boiling round where I stood—and the dazzling thing he held began to fade and shrink. In a dim way, I realised that there was a conflict between my power and the thing he held. I was channeling force to destroy him, but he was blocking it, somehow, with the strange talisman he held. And it was deadlock.

"The devil," Wilson's thought came again. "Can it be that he has a defence?"

"He's holding something . . ."

"What is it? I cannot see, not with your eyes, not now . . ."

"It's a triangle. If you think of a triangle with the sides made of hollow curves—concave arcs—and a round hole in the centre . . ."

"The Yoni of Isis!" That was Yalna's thought. Then Wilson again.

"I've heard of it but never dreamed it was still in existence. I thought Ferrars was *seeking* the 'object of power,' but it seems he has had it, all the time." All this at lightning speed, while we were frozen in deadlock struggle, in an ever-growing strain. The room was beginning to haze over, but I could just see, behind that evil head, a gold-framed diagram on the wall—and, suddenly, what I saw set my wits into life, into understanding. Ferrars had been seeking the other half of the 'object of power,' the complement of that which he now held. And I knew, now, what it was. What was more, I knew how to use it.

The ankh! Even as I thought of it, there it was in my hand, but now I held it properly, by the loop, as one does a sword. I went forward. The ankh hummed in my hand, and the 'thing' that was Bannerman screamed, cowered, and was lost in a blinding burst of white light as the ankh and the yoni met and fused. I had a momentary sensation, too, of screaming, in the split second before I was sundered into atoms. And I had just the ghost of a last impression of pleasure, of blessed relief and release—a looking-forward to the bliss to come.

So it was that I awoke with a dreadful, depressing sense of disappointment at the weight of my body, and the ache and stiffness of its all-too-solid reality. The glaring light, directly above, hurt my eyes. I groaned, sat up, and felt sick as I heard the whine of the generator running down. Then I remembered Anna, by my side, and reached out to shake her, gently. She sighed, took a deep breath, opened her eyes, and Hassim came through the sliding door in the plastic panels, almost on the run.

"What has gone wrong?" he demanded, his dark face stiff with apprehension. It took me a dull moment to catch on, that we, Anna and I, should not be sitting here at all. We were dead. Ken and Yalna should be in our place! Then memory flowed back, and I peered at Hassim.

"Nothing wrong," I croaked, "All according to plan. Ferrars is destroyed. Ken said all four, or none . . ." and Hassim's eyes narrowed.

"See to yourselves!" he snapped, and whirled like a cat, leaving us, and now he was on the run. "I'm going to Berkeley Square!" he called, as he went. Seconds later, long before I'd have given him time just to get downstairs, I heard the Rolls start up and roar off. Over the crash and bang of a growing thunderstorm. Thunderstorm? My wits were still thick, but I recalled that the weather had begun to break up, during the afternoon we were 'preparing.' The banging was quite frequent, now, and the hiss and drone of rain on the roof made me shiver to hear it. Anna, sitting up, shivered with me.

"Come on," I said, wearily. "Let's get some clothes on."

I had to help her to stand, and that took just about all my strength. Some three or four minutes later I heard a fire-engine go by, up the hill, bell clanging like the crack of doom, and I had a weird moment of wonder. A fire, in this cloud-burst? But the wonder was a thing of a moment, against my appalling weariness. I found Anna asleep in the chair where she had flopped, with a flimsy undergarment in her lax fingers. I managed to struggle with her as far as my bed, tucked her in, and then, clutching my dressing-gown, I practically fell downstairs, to the huge settee down there in the lounge.

Monday morning has its own connotations of depression and reversion to awful normality, but I doubt there was ever a Monday morning like this one. Six of us, Hassim, Ferguson, myself, Anna—and Ken Wilson and Yalna—all together again, and most prosaically eating breakfast, but the events were too

shattering and too recent for us to be able to throw them off altogether. We were very quiet. We heard about the freak thunderstorm, about the mysterious fire which had completely gutted the house and home of one 'Mr. Bannerman,' an elderly recluse who lived on the western fringe of Wimbledon Common. Theory had it that the lightning had started the fire. Ferguson relayed to us the surprise and dismay of the policeman on watch outside the Berkeley Square house when he saw Hassim tear up in the car and rescue the two limp but living bodies in the basement room. Then we listened as Ken Wilson hazarded an explanation. On the table in front of him, among the breakfast things, stood the ankh, unchanged save that it now stood in a base, a concave-sided triangle of gold.

"The current obsession with the sexual angle in symbolism," he said, quietly, "has served to obscure the fact that sex, in itself, is only one small aspect of the great dichotomy of nature, the basic building force of the Universe. Action and reaction; positive and negative; Yin and Yang; good and evil; this is the duality which creates and maintains all things. Superficially, the ankh is male and the yoni is female, but that is our own human personal approach. I am as much to blame as anyone for not realising this much sooner. How can I put it? Either is an 'object-of-power' in itself, but used in conjunction with each other, they would give the controlling person power over the Universe itself—or this small part of it, at any rate. Now, united as they are, they are neutralised. The crisis is past. I have only one consolation, that Ferrars made even more mistakes than I did. How he missed knowing that I had the ankh, I do not know. But even worse, how could he think, for one moment, that he would have been able to control such power, once he had it. It would inevitably have destroyed him, as it did, in fact. And there it is. Here . . . Chappie, Anna . . ." he pushed the ankh across to me. "This belongs to you, now, as a pair. That is its function, after all."

It stands on my desk as I write this. Out of the window I can see sunlight sparkling on the bright waters of the fjord, reflecting the mightiness of a snow-capped mountain. This life is pleasant. I still keep in touch with Ken Wilson, and Yalna, and Hassim. Pleasant—although it won't compare with what I've seen of 'heaven,' it has its compensations. I can hear Mrs. Chappie Jones singing, in the kitchen, downstairs. Her name, of course, is Anna. Yes, there are compensations.

—John Rackham

This milestone issue in the history of Science Fantasy would not be complete without an adventure of our beloved cyberneticist, Hek Belov, in which, for once, he and Emilio Batti sink their differences of opinion in a common cause.

STILL CENTRE

BY EDWARD MACKIN

No one can accuse me of being anything other than philosophic about my continuing poverty. When I complain it isn't because I have no money ; but simply because of the importance people attach to this fact. Given unlimited credit, friends, poverty wouldn't worry me at all. I don't want to be a millionaire : I just want to live like one.

I tried to explain this attitude to Emilio a short while ago ; but he was obsessed with the idea of money at the time (a little matter of twenty-five pounds, and some odd shillings that I happen to owe him) and he didn't seem to understand.

He removed his tall, chef's hat, threw it on the floor, and jumped on it. Then he forgot all the English he ever knew, and railed at me in Italian, with adjectival hand and arm movements. It was an awe-inspiring sight to see a man of his size in such a rage. I left without even saying goodbye ; pausing only to remove a sandwich from the fingers of a startled customer near the door. One has to live.

It would, perhaps, have been wiser to have kept clear of the restaurant for a few days ; but the stomach sometimes

leads where the rest of the body is unwilling to venture, and the following morning found me outside his place, debating whether or no to chance my luck.

I think the swine must have been standing behind the door ready to pounce on me, because I was suddenly grabbed by the arm, and dragged inside.

"Belov," said Emilio, grimly, "I want you should come with me."

I found myself propelled, willy-nilly, across the restaurant, and into the kitchen, where I was invited to sit down. It was either that or a displaced shoulder. I sat down on the only chair there, and Emilio stood over me. For the first time I noticed that he had a meat cleaver in his other hand. It struck me rather forcibly, too, that he wasn't in a very good humour.

"My friend," I placated, getting ready to dodge, "I expect to be settling with you in a day or two. My uncle Ferenc has just died, and left me his entire collection of rare butterflies."

"Raw butterflies?" he frowned. "What I do with raw butterflies?"

The great thing in a situation like this is to keep talking.

"You could use them in some exotic dish," I suggested, "and clean up on the weird element. Or you could display them in the window with a notice saying: 'Fill up on good food, and keep these out of your stomach.' That would be bound to attract attention. Think of the valuable publicity, old friend." His frown deepened. "It's all in the packaging," I went on, looking round desperately for a way of escape. "Take the steady state, for example . . ."

"Belov!" he bellowed, cutting my filibustering short, and I noticed that his eyes had taken on a strange, glazed look. "Belov," he said again; but quietly this time, "listening to you I think sometimes my brains is loose, or maybe I have waste my time learning English." He wet his thumb, and ran it along the edge of the cleaver in an absent fashion. "Would you like something to eat?" he asked.

I nodded, and eyed him warily, wondering what he intended to do.

"You can have anything you like," he said. "A nice porterhouse steak, maybe . . ."

He was mad.

"Just a ham sandwich," I ventured, "and I'll take it with me."

He looked surprised. "This is not like you," he said. "You are quite well, aren't you, Belov?" He sounded anxious. "You are not ill just when I want you should help me?"

"Aha!" I exclaimed. "So that's it." My professional services were required. This was a horse of another colour. "At your service, old friend," I told him, and rubbed my hands together. "Cancel that ham sandwich. My indisposition has passed. I'll have a double helping of whatever you recommend, followed by cherry pie baked in your own inimitable fashion, and with just a little fresh cream. I think a little hock to go with it, or maybe a light Burgundy. You could have it sent in. Do you happen to have any good cigars around the place . . ."

He held up his free hand. "Wait!" he entreated, and then mopped his brow with a chequered cloth, which he pulled from a table. "All right, you have all of this. Anything you like; but first you help me with my problem, huh?"

"Agreed," I said, quickly. "Just lay it out for me. What was it blew up in your face? That incinerator you call an oven, or the Stone-Age ice-box? You should get some new equipment, Emilio. Even a genius needs to tool up once in a while."

"I should get some customers who will eat less and pay more," he said, acidly. "The problem is not anything what you mention. It is Bhorgil. Last week he bought this whole block, and now he wants for to pull it down, and build a hovertel, with direct jet-in service. I have notice to quit." He pulled a sheet of paper from an inside pocket, and gave it to me.

I read it, and handed it back. "He can do it, too," I told him. "That's authoritative, and on the level."

"I kill 'im!" said Emilio, simply, and made sweeping motions with the cleaver all around my ears.

"Wait a minute, old friend," I said, nervously. "I'm not Joe Bhorgil. I'm just about half this city short of that, plus his foreign holdings. I hear he's letting the Americans print their own currency next year."

"I would like to cut his head off," he said, with the sadness of one who knows he is dreaming impossible dreams; but he put the cleaver down.

"Can you beat it," I said. "You mean he wants to pull this beautiful twentieth-century slum down, and put up a clean, new, horrible bird sanctuary for jet-propelled blondes, and their jaded boy friends?"

He nodded, gloomily, and then it hit me. *I was involved.* I don't know how the deeper significance escaped me before; but now I jumped up, and grabbed him by the stained lapels of his white coat.

"What about me?" I asked him. "What am I going to do? You've spoilt me for eating anywhere else. The swine! Give me that cleaver, Emilio. I'll kill him myself!"

He pushed me down into the chair again. "That's not clever," he said. "Something clever is what we want, Belov. Something to soften his heart, maybe."

"I know Bhorgil," I said. "Anything that would soften his heart would burn a hole through a block of granite a yard thick. Bring on the food, Emilio. I think better when I've eaten."

I couldn't think of anything better than mooching along to the *Marleton*, which is an exclusive club, on the East side of Victory Plaza, patronised only by the filthy rich. I'd been there before; quite often, in fact. There's something about the wealthy that attracts me. I think it must be their money. Well, maybe not their money; but the company it keeps, and the things it will buy. Helijets, for instance. There's a fascination about these beautiful, hovering, almost silent discs, and as for the company . . .

Friends, the pulchritudinous blondes and red-heads that pass through the august portals of the *Marleton* are what an engineer would call line jobs, precise to the last, sleeked-up hair, and with enough femininity at only half-drive to knock a lesser man than me dizzy with desire.

I must have hit a quiet period, because there was no traffic either in or out, and nothing to leer at except a passing doxy wearing the latest, unbosomed look, and partnered by a cloaked cav with huge hat, and sweeping feathers. They climbed into their stripped-down parafliv, and shot off immediately, hot-rodding in a screaming arc over the roof tops and dodging in and out of the heavy air traffic. They would never see their first grey hairs, and that for sure; but perhaps they didn't want to.

Just afterwards a sleek, black helijet slid in. I was lucky. It was Joe Bhorgil himself with a dark-haired cutie not half his age. His secretary, of course. Bound to be. Just for a moment his arm slid around her shoulder as he helped her on with a wrap, and their faces were closer than they should have been. A picture of them like that, smiling at each other in a very intimate way might have knocked the bottom out of the hovertel scheme, because a picture like that would have sent his wife berserk. Joe was a tough character ; but she was tougher.

It was as well for him that I was a man with some ethical standards. It was even more fortunate for him that I didn't have a camera. Suddenly he let go of the girl, and leapt towards me.

"Don't you dare !" he snarled, and I sidestepped. But it wasn't me he was after. It was someone to the left of where I was standing. A young man with—of all things—a camera. One of those expensive solido jobs that show every blemish, and are popular with the news-flash men ; but frowned on in the world of portraiture.

Joe's hand swept down, and five-hundred-pounds-worth of goggling gimmickry bounced at my feet. I glanced at the shocked photographer.

"You can rub a nought or two off that," I told him ; "but don't worry. I saw what happened. He made an unprovoked and violent attack on you. You've got a clear case, my friend."

"You mind your own damned business," said Bhorgil, unpleasantly, "or I'll have you both arrested for trespass, and anything else I can think of ! You are standing on my property."

"How long have my feet been your property," I asked him, "you lascivious old ruffian ?"

He looked as if he would have liked to tear me apart. I grinned at his purpling face, and he raised his clenched fists, then dropped them again, and went back to the girl, who had been regarding the whole thing with detached, almost geisha-like, serenity. They went into the club.

"Belov," I said, aloud, "any influence you may have had with the gentleman just vanished along with Emilio's restaurant. I knew a half-cousin of his wife's sister's hairdresser," I explained to the photographer, who was busy salvaging his camera. "Bhorgil will be upset when he finds out."

"Like finding a million pounds," said the young man, bitterly, as he prised the back off the camera. "The only thing that would upset him would be a good kick in the bank balance!"

He walked off down the level, and I looked for somewhere to sit while I considered the problem of Bhorgil. An elderly and prosperous-looking gentleman was sitting on a stone seat under the enormous, eviscerated gargoyle that was supposed to represent Victory; but maybe it was near enough at that. The Sino-European war had gutted both sides without achieving anything.

I sat next to him. "A nice day," I said.

"Yes," he agreed, "very."

We watched a helijet streaking over the Plaza.

"You know," he said, turning to me, "I doubt if the inherent dangers of the device are appreciated; but then, of course, it isn't fully understood."

"Oh, I don't know," I said, "those jet jockeys are pretty smart."

"I was referring to the gyroscope," he told me. "Every one of those things has a gyro in it somewhere. Maybe three or four. Everywhere you look there are gyroscopes performing some function or other these days." It seemed to sadden him.

"Don't forget the grav lifts," I reminded him, "with their big daddy gyros."

He peered at me over his glasses, and nodded. "Have you considered the effect of these things?" he inquired. "Have you given any thought to it at all?"

"Well, yes and no," I said, cautiously. "Most of the deep thinking I do is about food or women, in that order. I once knew a cute little rave named Gladys Blick . . ."

"Undoubtedly," he commented, which seemed to wipe that up. He took a flat metal case from his pocket, and opened it. "Would you care for a cigarette? By the way, my name is Kelso—Gordon Kelso."

I took a cigarette, and we shook hands.

"Hek Belov," I told him, "at your service."

The cigarette was one of the expensive self-lighting kind. It lit merely by drawing on it. Evidently, he was a man of means. We smoked in silence for a while, and I devised a suitable name for a charitable cause of which I was founder,

administrative head, and sole beneficiary, and to which I was certain he could be persuaded to contribute. While I was wondering how to introduce the subject he took some written notes from his pocket, and handed them to me.

"Two-thousand inertial foot-tons per cubic mile," he said. "Just glance through these papers, and you'll see I'm right. That's only a rough estimate, of course. I believe the inertial loss to be much greater. Can you wonder that the Earth has slowed down appreciably in the last ten years?"

"No," I said, a bit uneasily. "It's just that I thought I was getting faster."

I certainly meet them. The notes consisted of a mass of abstruse calculations. I gave them back to him. "It'll never get off the ground," I said, and prepared to move off.

He laid a detaining hand on my shoulder. "It was never intended to," he said, earnestly. "I am merely intent on feeding back into the Earth a percentage of the lost inertial energy. Perhaps you'd like to see my equipment?"

"Some other time," I refused, hastily. "I'm a very busy man."

"Indeed," he returned, "and what is your profession?"

"I'm a cyberneticist," I told him, "and the best in the country."

"In that case you must look at my inertial balance readjuster. Perhaps I failed to make myself clear." He smiled slightly. "An old man and his hobby horse, you know. I've been living with the problem for so long that I think everyone must understand. Well, then, the theory is this. Ever since Sperry brought his great mind to bear on the performance of the gyroscope the principle has both vexed and intrigued countless engineers and experimenters.

"You may remember that Sperry, after pointing the whirling axle at the Sun, was astonished to see with what stubbornness it held its direction. The spinning wheel seemed to turn over within its frame once every twenty-four hours; but, in fact, it just kept on pointing towards the Sun. The Sun doesn't move, and neither did the spinning wheel; so he came to the conclusion that the world revolved around the gyroscope."

"Bully for him!" I said.

He nodded. "Exactly. But that's not the only strange thing about the gyroscope. For a long time people had had

more than a suspicion that buried somewhere in the only partly-understood theory of gyroscopics was the answer to another problem, that of gravity. Round about nineteen-twenty-six someone invented a kind of gyroscopic bedstead. That's what it looks like in the patent application. It had a specially designed gyroscope at all four corners. These were electrically-driven, and when the whole thing was in operation it floated as high as six feet off the ground ; but no-one would believe that it wasn't a fake. They couldn't understand that it was possible to extract inertial energy from the rotation of the Earth, and use it to counteract the force of gravity. Eventually, the inventor vanished into obscurity."

"That's a good place to vanish into," I commented.

"Precisely," he nodded ; "but the point I wish to make is this. Today an immense amount of inertial force is being extracted, and this is likely to be still further increased as the use of the gyroscopic principle is inevitably extended." He brought his fist down on his knee to emphasise the point he was trying to make. "This can't go on for ever. Interference with such inertial forces is a very dangerous thing. It must be rectified. The energy must be fed back, otherwise we shall have the Earth slowing up altogether and crashing into the Sun."

"Good," I said, and he looked at me sharply, "heavens !" I added.

It was an old gag, and he regarded me coldly for a second. "It's a very serious problem," he told me. "I'm doing what I can to offset the effects of this grave misuse of a limited field force. Unfortunately, there are complications associated with the fact that the Earth does revolve around the gyroscope. I'm only feeding back a small percentage of the extracted energy, of course. I would need Government backing to build the really large plant required, and I just can't seem to interest them."

"Amazing !" I said, snapping my teeth at him.

He spread his hands. "Quite. I am rather astonished myself at their persistent refusal to help. It would require at least twenty-million pounds to construct the kind of inertial feedback plant I envisage. My own small plant cost me something short of thirty-thousand pounds."

I had begun to feel drowsy under the influence of his droning voice ; but now I snapped into wakefulness. Thirty-thousand pounds ! I warmed to him, immediately.

"My friend," I said, smiling expansively, "I understand perfectly. You have come to the right man. In my youth I made a special study of gyroscopic action. I have written voluminously on the subject."

A slight exaggeration, perhaps. I did write to the local news-flash people on one occasion about the vibrating and noisy grav lifts on Third Level. I went into technical details, too. The fault, I said, was due to damned bad maintenance. I remember that the noise made sleep impossible; but the only result of my complaint was that I received a visit from the landlord, who was also responsible for the lifts, and I was given notice to quit with only three weeks rent owing. That's what comes of having a social conscience.

"Perhaps you'd like to see my equipment?"

"I'd be pleased to. Never let it be said that Belov didn't recognise genius when he saw it. You have some money left, of course?"

"Oh yes. I have a few holdings; but it would be difficult to say just how much these represent."

"Don't worry about it," I told him. "I take it that you are thinking of retaining me as consultant engineer, or something of the kind? I could take a lot of worry off your shoulders. The retaining fee would be nominal, naturally. No-one wants to make a lot of money out of such a worthy cause. Shall we say ten pounds?"

"Well, I hadn't thought . . ." he began, uncertainly. "But perhaps . . ." he dug a shiny, leather wallet from an inside pocket, and extracted a note. "Here you are, Mr. Belov," he said.

I folded it carefully, and put it away. He had a friend for life.

His experimental feedback apparatus was located on West Bank below ground level; right on the solid foundations. Two enormous gyro-mechanisms occupied opposite corners of the room, and right in the centre was a tall, box-like structure made of heavy aluminium, which I later found screened something that looked like a giant Tesler coil. A pair of cables from this went straight to earth. Around the walls were masses of electronic equipment protected by clip-in transparent plastic panels.

Kelso rubbed his hands together, briskly. "My little plant is capable of feeding back twenty-nine foot-tons of inertial energy at maximum. This," he added, allowing himself a faint smile, "should extend the Earth's useful life by about ten seconds over ten-thousand years."

"Well, it's a start," I said; "but isn't it a bit like processing a ton of pig-iron to obtain a single pin?"

"If there were no other way that's what you'd have to do," he returned, mildly, "and if you wanted a pin badly enough you'd count it cheap."

"Don't ever read Lamb's *'Dissertation On Roast Pig,'*" I advised him, "or the next time you fancy a pork chop it might seem all right to burn the block down."

"I'm a vegetarian," he said, directing a slight frown at me. He threw a switch, and the great gyros began to move as the resistance snapped out. Soon the whole place was filled with their heavy droning. Kelso nodded to me. "Three-thousand revs," he shouted to make himself heard above the noise of the rapidly rotating gyros; "but I can get them up to ten times that speed."

"Don't do it," I bellowed back, "or they'll go out through the wall!"

He shook his head. "No, I don't think so. What would happen," he brought his mouth close to my ear, "is that we'd get a still centre. It would extend right through the building. From my calculations the inertial wave would fan out and fill the whole structure. This, in effect would isolate it from the surrounding terrain."

"Break that down," I told him. "I'm just not with you."

He reduced the gyro speed so that he could make himself heard at ordinary conversational voice level. "As you probably know," he said, "it can be proved theoretically that every revolving object has a still centre. This absolute, dead centre is just that. It doesn't move at all. If it did it would have to move both ways at once. You see that, of course? Both ways at once," he repeated.

I felt my brain trying it. "Naturally," I said, and shook my head to clear it.

"Well now, there is another still centre involved in Sperry's classic conclusion concerning the movement of gyroscopic axes. This is always at right angles to the main centre. If we could adjust these to coincide we would have an inertial

gap or spatial pocket through which we could funnel energy—or extract it. Are you with me?"

"All the way," I lied.

"I'll show you something interesting in a moment," he went on. "Actually, it's only a by-product of the main project; but most interesting just the same. If I increase speed to near the maximum the inertial wave fans out, and fills the whole building." He removed his glasses, and polished them with his handkerchief. Then he put them on again, and regarded me curiously. "It would then be impossible, Mr. Belov, for anyone to enter or leave the building. We would be right inside the still centre; but the barrier would not be the inertial force alone. The barrier would be dimensional. We'd be isolated, and to the outside observer the building would appear to revolve."

"Marvellous," I commented, grinning at him; "but you know what they say. If you can't package it you can't sell it."

My undisguised amusement was a mistake.

"You don't believe me, do you?" he said, in a tight voice.

It suddenly struck me that I might be tangling with a psychopath. "Certainly, I believe you," I reassured him, and moved towards the door.

He snatched at the load-plate handle, and brought it round the full arc. The whole place shook as the big gyros screeched into high speed.

I opened the door quickly, and shot down the passageway, and up a short flight of steps to the exit. I opened the outer door. Night seemed to have descended. I did a quick mental calculation. It would hardly be midday. Yet outside it was as black as hell. Only the smell of green cheese was missing to remind me of Doctor Johnson's famous remark. I checked, quickly. I hadn't blundered into a cupboard, as he had done. There wasn't another door.

Cautiously, I approached the outer darkness, and stretched out a tentative hand. I met resistance, and pushed; but the darkness didn't give. I tried pushing with both hands. No dice. I shut my eyes, and tried to walk out. I was hoping it was some kind of illusion. It wasn't, and my features met something as unresisting as a wall of steel. I rubbed the generous family nose, and swore. When I turned around Kelso was standing there, watching me. He seemed slightly amused.

He was a genius, of course ; but there is a time and a place for everything, and he was out of line on both.

"Are you quite satisfied, Mr. Belov?" he inquired.

"Like I had a hole in the head," I told him, wrathfully, "you gimbal-headed gyro-maniac!"

I shoved him aside, and ran down the plascrete steps. He made a half-hearted attempt to stop me cutting the current, and then I was galloping back up the steps again, and out of the door, where everything had returned to normality. The scream of the gyros had dropped to a subdued droning as Belov went belting out on to the Level—and then he was belting back in again.

There were crowds of people outside gaping at the building in amazement, and the riot-cans were jetting in from all directions. They began to disgorge their loads of grim-looking police at strategic spots about the Level. I closed the door quickly, and looked at Kelso.

"The man who first ventured out with an umbrella was stoned to death," I told him. "People just don't like the unusual, and the police like it even less. Is there another way out of here?"

Before he could answer, the door burst inwards, and half-a-dozen burly police officers threw themselves upon us. As they carried me through the door I tried to explain that it was all a mistake.

"Fellow citizens," I said, "I think you have been misinformed by the larrikins and drunken layabouts that infest this part of town. My colleague and I are engaged on work of national importance. You should discount any stories you may have heard about revolving buildings, or suchlike twaddle . . ."

A big hand was clapped across my mouth, and then I was thrown into one of the riot-cans. Kelso was dumped on top of me. He was complaining that he had lost his glasses. The can took off with the radio officer miking on all channels: "Clear Lane Two! Clear Lane Two! Police emergency! Clear Lane Two . . .!"

I pushed Kelso off me, and sat up. "You damned villain!" I said, glaring at him. "This is my reward for placing my unique talents at your disposal, and all for a paltry ten pounds. I must have been mad!"

The trouble is, friends, I am easily imposed upon.

The station officer was a stout man in a wrinkled uniform, and with a look of permanent boredom. After listening to the list of charges against us, including inciting to riot, resisting arrest, and striking a police officer in the course of his duty, I had an inspiration. I told the officer that we were acting under orders from Bhorgil, who owned the building. I said we were installing a new type of grav lift ; but something had gone wrong. I had no intention of being caught with the first umbrella.

Kelso looked sharply at me ; but said nothing.

The Charge Officer nodded, wearily. "We'll get him," he said. "Sit down on that form, and wait. Keep well apart, and don't talk to each other."

One of the officers who had brought us in came over. "Here's your glasses," he said, and handed them to me.

"I didn't know you wore glasses," Kelso said. "Where's mine?" he asked the police officer.

"You never had any," the officer told him, and walked away.

I put the glasses on. When Bhorgil walked through that door I didn't want him to recognise me. In the circumstances the photographic incident had been most unfortunate. We sat and waited.

"I can't see a thing without my glasses," whispered Kelso.

I couldn't see a damn thing with them ! I couldn't even see Kelso. Eventually, someone passed a note to the Charge Officer.

"He never heard of you," he told us, in an even voice ; "but he's coming over just the same. He may want to press further charges."

"God bless him !" I said. "The dog-faced, money-grabbing shyster !"

A few minutes later Bhorgil barged into the station, breathing fire and fury. "Where are these criminals who say they work for me?" he demanded. "Confront me with them !"

I stood up at once. "My friend," I said, staring at the vague shape before me, "you have arrived just in time. These scoundrels were about to throw us into gaol ! I thought of you right away, of course. Remember that magnificent dinner we had together, and those girls . . . By heavens ! What a time we had !" I reached out, and clapped him on the shoulder. "You dog !" I laughed. "What were their names, now ? Don't tell me. I'll get them in a minute . . ."

This was a fairly safe ploy with a character like Bhorgil. His private life would probably have made a Kinsey Foundation report on its own.

I couldn't see his expression ; but he seemed to have stopped breathing. "The tall, dark piece got drunk and wanted to sue you ; but you were pretty tight yourself, and . . ."

He coughed like someone choking, and I knew I had him. When he spoke again he didn't seem so certain of himself, and he wasn't taking a chance.

"Your face is vaguely familiar," he said ; "but I don't remember our, er - hmm . . ." His voice trailed off, and he turned to the Charge Officer. "I'll stand surety for these men."

The officer went away, probably to consult with somebody else. When he came back he said : "Special bail has been fixed at fifty pounds in each case, sir. Is that all right ?"

I shifted the glasses, slightly so that I could see Bhorgil's reaction. He pursed his lips, but got his cheque book out, and scribbled the amount in. The Charge Officer entered the details in a book, and we were allowed to go.

Bhorgil shepherded us into his classy helijet, and buttoned the auto-pilot. Then he turned to us and demanded to know just what our damned game was, and what we had been up to in his building.

"You've got the city by the ears," he said, frowning. "Just what were you up to ? What's this about the building appearing to revolve ?"

He had probably made some inquiries, and scented commercial possibilities ; but he would have to be led on.

"Well," began Kelso, "if you will just allow me to relate a little of the history of the gyroscope . . ."

I headed him off, quickly. "Some other time. Mr. Bhorgil is a busy man. He just wants the briefest outline. Now then, Mr. Bhorgil, if you're not tired of making millions, here's another bankful to jockey up your headstone. We have perfected a protective screen that no enemy can pierce. We could, if necessary, isolate this country from any possible attack."

"We could ?" said Kelso. He seemed surprised.

"Like all great inventions," I went on, nudging Kelso with my elbow, "we happened on this quite fortuitously."

"Really, Belov . . ." began Kelso frowning at me.

"It is a tremendous contribution to national defence," I put in, loudly.

"It had better be tremendous," Bhorgil told us, "and no funny business, or you may find yourself in gaol after all. Tell me how this thing is supposed to work."

I gave him a loaded explanation, while pressing hard on Kelso's foot. Bhorgil listened, impassively, and didn't comment. Eventually, we slid into West Bank and Bhorgil parked his craft on a space near the building. We were greeted by an officer in charge of a detachment of soldiers, who were deployed about the landing space.

"I'm afraid you'll have to take off again, sir," said the officer apologetically, in deference to obvious opulence. "This is a prohibited area."

I looked across at the Bhorgil building. Even in the fading light it should have been clearly visible; but all I could see over Kelso's glasses was a white blur like a carelessly brushed-in monolith in an impressionist painting of the contemporary scene. It appeared to be spinning.

"Dimensional slip," said Kelso, squinting at it with his hands around his eyes. "Otherwise the place would break up. Actually, it's not moving at all . . ."

"That's my building," Bhorgil told the officer, "and I have a lien on all inventive rights incorporated in, or associated with it."

The officer shook his head. "Not any more, sir," he said. "The Government has appropriated it under the National Defence Act of nineteen-eighty-three. Compensation will be paid, of course."

"About one-tenth of real value," snarled Bhorgil.

"Do move off, sir," pleaded the officer. "I don't want to use force; but I have strict orders to keep this area clear."

"Just a moment," said Kelso. "I have some valuable equipment in that building, which is responsible for the effect you observe."

"So you are the fellow?" said the officer, curiously. "What's your name?"

Kelso told him.

The officer nodded. "You'd better come with me. General Whyan would like a word with you I expect. This looks like

being a tremendous contribution to national defence. Will you come this way?" They began to walk off.

"Just a moment!" thundered Bhorgil, and stepping-forward made a grab at the officer's arm to detain him. "Now look here . . ." he began.

One of the soldiers, who was standing nearby, whipped out his stun gun, and an impact pellet hit Bhorgil just over the heart. It exploded softly, and he dropped like an old ruin. The soldier slid his gun back into the holster again, and looked as if nothing had happened. They're quick, these boys.

"Get him home," said the officer, imperturbably. "He'll be all right in five minutes. If he isn't, bury him."

Kelso looked vaguely distressed. I gave him back his glasses I had no further use for them now. He put them on, and gazed down at the prostrate millionaire.

"Dear me," he said. "Poor Mr. Bhorgil. We led him astray, you know. The defensive aspect of my inertial equipment won't stand up to examination. The thin shield at the slip face wouldn't stop an atomic shell, for instance. I satisfied myself about that long ago." He dug into his pocket, and brought his notebook out again. "I have the mathematical proof here . . ."

"Don't bother," I advised him, taking the book out of his hand, and thrusting it back into his pocket. "Figures only confuse me, unless they're female and photogenic."

Gently but firmly the officer led Kelso away, and a couple of soldiers helped me to get Bhorgil into the helijet. I closed the door, and had a look at the controls. Simplicity itself, with full auto-control. One merely pressed the right button, and the built-in computer did the rest.

Bhorgil groaned slightly as we became airborne, and I looked around for something that might help. There was an iced-water dispenser, and next to it a small cubby-hole containing a bottle, and two glasses. The bottle was three parts full of Scotch. I half-filled a glass with the whisky, and drank it. Then I splashed some ice-water in Bhorgil's face. He groaned again, and sat up.

"Whisky or water, or both?" I asked him.

He glared at me, but said nothing. With a great show of determination he managed to get to his feet and stagger over to where he kept the Scotch. He poured himself almost a full glass, and drank it off at a gulp. Then he sat down by the

controls, and gazed out of the forward port. The weaving, glowing traffic shot past on every side ; but Bhorgil didn't see it. He was still working out on his grievances.

" I'll have that puppy stripped of his uniform !" he swore, angrily. " He'll be sorry he tangled with Joe Bhorgil." He looked at me and looked away. Then his head swivelled for a quick second take. " You !" he exclaimed. " It was those glasses fooled me. I remember you now. You were the fellow that was with that other fellow—the photographer. Do you know they flashed that damned picture in the *People and Places* spot ? My wife always watches that load of rubbish. I haven't dared go home since. I'm going to sue the company, and everyone concerned. That includes you."

" Don't be like that," I said, " or you are likely to break up a very beautiful friendship. Me and your money."

Indeed, friends, I have the greatest respect, and even affection for wealth ; but none for the wealthy.

" Pah !" he said, and pressed a button on the auto-panel.

The helijet dipped, and went down, coming in for a perfect landing on a strip near the *Marleton*. Bhorgil had the door open almost before we had touched down, and was through it before I could get out of my seat. It hadn't occurred to me that there was any particular hurry.

To my surprise he closed it from the outside, and then the panel light died, and I knew he had pulled the key-plug out. I pressed the button a couple of times ; but the door wouldn't open. I even tried the engines ; but they wouldn't respond. It was just an attack of straw-clutching. The vehicle was completely immobilized, and I was a prisoner. That almost certainly meant that he'd gone for the police, the swine !

It was no use telling myself that I was innocent of any offence. Innocence was merely a relative term as far as the police were concerned. I watched Bhorgil until he had vanished through the august portals of the *Marleton*, and then I resigned myself to the inevitable. Just the same there didn't seem to be any reason why I shouldn't make myself comfortable while I waited for the police to arrive, so I poured myself another glass of Bhorgil's Scotch, and sat down to drink it.

Outside on the strip the public service deepee was relaying a girlie show ; the great, blonde hoofers seeming to leap at the viewer across the intervening space, and drag him around with them as they cavorted about the studio stage. The vivid

colour, and the harsh music—the sound increased in volume on meeting an object such as a jet, on the split-reflection-pulse-repeat system, so that an insulated cabin didn't help—combined with the whisky to rock my wits around.

I decided that the girls were all approximately my type ; but that the penultimate one from the left was my choice for the evening. She had that indefinable something called charm. She had lots of everything else, too.

I drank her health. "I'm going away for a while," I told her ; "so don't wait up for me. You'll find my cheque book in the usual place. Help yourself, of course. Buy anything you want. Never let it be said that Belov set a price on beauty. You've no need to worry about the overdraft, dear heart. I haven't even got an account. Just keep changing your address until I get out. Better change your name pretty often, too. Otherwise, the world is your oyster."

She smiled, and nodded. Her face was very close to mine. It was suddenly borne on me that I was rapidly getting drunk. I shook my head to clear it, and glanced over at the *Marleton*, and was just in time to see Bhorgil emerge, looking very furtive, and carrying a couple of heavy cases. At his side was his favourite secretary. They paused at the door for an instant, while Bhorgil looked up and down and across the strip, and then they hurried towards a small, red helijet parked near the entrance. The girl got in first, and took the cases off him. Then Bhorgil got in and the door closed. I watched them take off and disappear into the gathering dusk; lights winking as they cut across the lanes.

I was full of whisky, and not really capable of sustained thought. I tried to work out what was going on ; but I hadn't the slightest clue. A police jet swooped in, and landed nearby. The door slid back, and two uniformed men got out accompanied by a man in plain clothes. They walked quickly over to where I was peering at them like a bleary-eyed goldfish in a darkened bowl.

"You sure this is Bhorgil's can?" asked the detective.

One of them nodded. "This is it all right, sergeant."

The sergeant flashed a torch on the view-port, and I dodged back.

"There's someone in there," he said. "Who are you?" he demanded.

"Bhorgil," I informed him, keeping out of sight. "Joe Bhorgil. Community Enterprises, and all that lucrative hoo-ha."

There was a muttered conversation outside, and the police jet took off, leaving the detective-sergeant behind. They'd probably found the key-plug missing, and gone for the necessary gear to spring me out of the cabin.

"All right, Bhorgil," bellowed the detective, "we'll soon have you out of there!"

I didn't quite like the tone of his voice; but I dismissed it, and had another spot of whisky. The bottle was empty now. I dropped it on the floor, and settled back in my seat to take in a bit more of the deepie show. There wasn't much else I could do, and what had I to lose? I soon found out.

The show had finished, and the enormous face of Chris Cooper, the middle-aged news-rave, was giving the latest snippets of news, views and malicious gossip, supported by touched-up pic-flashes, and carefully-edited film. The scanners ran back so that the viewers could see Chris take a piece of paper from the 'late delivery' slot, and examine it with pretended excitement.

"Here's something, ladies and gentlemen," he announced, "to set you back in your chairs. Those who have tears prepare to shed them for honest Joe Bhorgil, whose empire just blew up in his face. The police would like to talk with Joe about one or two little matters like," he consulted his paper, "share cropping, dumping, purveying bad stock, large-scale forgery and almost anything else you like to name. Our Joe is really in trouble . . ."

So was I! I jumped to my feet, suddenly stone cold sober, and looked about me like a hunted animal. I had to get out of this. It wouldn't take long to prove that I wasn't Joe Bhorgil. In fact, as soon as the police saw me they'd know that, because everyone was familiar with Joe's rugged countenance. He was never out of the news. Now I'd landed myself right in with him. Hadn't I pretended to be Bhorgil while he made a getaway, probably with enough funds to sink a dozen banks when they checked back. In other words, I was an accessory before and after the fact, and this was probably only half the book they would throw at me. Belov was really in trouble. I foresaw a ten-year sentence at least.

Handsome Chris Cooper was still talking about the Bhorgil shock. "... It seems that Mrs. Bhorgil just happened to see that pic we flashed across the network this afternoon. The one with J.B. gazing lovingly into the brown eyes of his curvesome secretary. Mrs. Bhorgil took exception to it. So much so that she went straight to the police and put the skids well and truly under the big, fat feet of Mr. Joe Bhorgil. We understand that the police have the matter well in hand. They expect . . ."

My feverish brain was like a labyrinth full of white mice, all searching for a way out—and then I had it ! The inspection panel ! Under the floor covering there should be a long panel giving access to the power and lighting loom. I ripped back the heavy plastic covering, and was just able to discern the six-inch wide plate. I had a small screwdriver in my pocket kit, and a length of connecting wire. The only thing I didn't have was enough light. I had to rely on my memory, and feel for the connecting posts, and terminals.

I almost gave up after fiddling around for a full minute, and not finding anything that matched up with a plan I had once seen. Then it struck me where I had been going wrong. I had been working, in my anxiety, from the wrong end of the panel. I turned round, and rolled the plastic covering right back. This time everything was where it should have been, and I succeeded in making the necessary connections to bypass the key-plug. The last one was a bit tricky. I had to wrap my handkerchief around my hand to make it, because I wasn't sure of the location of the main switch. As it was I received a jolt that made me yelp.

The cabin lights came on immediately, and the sergeant began to panic. He thumped on the door, and demanded to know what was going on.

"Stand clear !" I shouted and, keeping my back to where I thought he was, flipped over the take-off switch, and buttoned the auto-pilot. The helijet rose gradually, and curved away from the strip to join the slow lane.

I looked back at a man dumbfounded as he watched the helijet, and probably his chances of promotion, speeding away from him. Then I gave my attention to the controls. I cut the auto-pilot, and took the jet into the North Side fast lane.

I parked on a quiet, residential strip, and then headed on foot towards Emilio's. I covered the ten miles in thirty

minutes, using mostly the fast ped-ways. By the time I got there I wasn't feeling too good. I regretted that empty whisky bottle. I should have left it the way it was. I'd killed it off, and now it was having its revenge.

I staggered into the restaurant and sat down at a vacant table.

"Belov !" bellowed Emilio. "Belov, my friend, I am glad to see you."

He came across, and breathed garlic all over me. I covered my face with my hands, and looked at him through my fingers. "Go away," I croaked.

"Have you heard ?" he asked, with a smile that took in his several chins, and even his crumpled chef's hat.

"About Bhorgil ?" I said, without any great enthusiasm. "Yes, old friend, I've heard. He's on the run, and you can tear up that notice to quit."

"We must celebrate. Belov, you can have anything you like to order. What you say to T-bone steak, with saute potatoes and fried onions ? And cherry pie, which I have just cooked ? Or maybe something else, huh ? We have a drink, too. What you say, Belov ? Champagne or Scotch ?"

I shuddered. Lowering my hands I looked at him through half-closed eyes. I could have wept. Here I was being offered anything I wanted, and just now I didn't want anything. Well, perhaps one thing . . .

"Come on, Belov, what you have ?" he demanded a trifle impatiently.

"A new stomach," I said, hollowly. "Failing that, a headache powder for the old one. I think it's trying to climb up my back."

He grinned at me. "You have been already celebrating, huh ? Well, I fix you up. What I get you is a big bowl of bacon fat . . ."

I was unable to answer the swine ! Getting to my feet I staggered outside.

It was, friends, the moment of truth.

—Edward Mackin

In collaboration with Dale R. Smith, Mr. Haugsrud appeared in No. 42 with a truly wacky fantasy entitled "Deities, Inc." His solo effort this month is in a different vein and concerns a witch-doctor and perhaps should be retitled "Which witch is the witch, Doctor?"

A CURE FOR MR. KELSY

BY LEROY B. HAUGSRUD

A moment after the impact, the car slowed down, almost to a stop. The white patch of the driver's face looked out and back at the man huddled against the curb. The street, otherwise empty, was lighted by the corner arc lamp swinging in the April wind.

For a few seconds the car rolled ahead, then the face withdrew. The tyres spun on the pavement and the vehicle jackrabbed into full acceleration. The tail lights winked out as it spun around a distant corner.

The street was bare now of any movement, although the corner light threw the shadow of its own pole in a finger of blackness that retreated and advanced in an irregular rhythm. The bundle which just a minute before had been a conscious human, remained motionless. The deeper shadows along the sidewalk stirred and extruded a cautious blob which in the light became a cat. A quick look each way showed no enemy

and, reassured, the animal drifted across the walk to hunch over the body. The nose sniffing inspection was broken off as the cat raised his head. As the squad car slowed and braked, the cat leaped over the body and disappeared in the darkness across the street.

The policeman, preceded by the oval of his flashlight, stopped, then knelt for a closer look. The pulse was a faint thread of life and he went back to consult with his partner in the car. The other nodded and picked up the microphone. Some minutes later, the ambulance came.

Dr. Persis Cory tapped the blotter too hard and broke the point on the pencil. She took a deep breath and tried again.

"Mr. Kelsy, I would appreciate some kind of a reply. I've had a busy day and this is upsetting my schedule. Now why couldn't you answer a few questions so my receptionist could fill out a card?"

The pale young man sitting across from her moistened his lips and poked with his forefinger at the hat in his lap. "If I had, you wouldn't have let me see you." He did not look up as he spoke, his finger busy prodding small dents in the hat. Dr. Cory compressed her attractive lips and turned a becoming shade of pink. "If this is some sort of sales approach Mr. Kelsy, I've had enough." She started to push back her chair. The man finally looked up at her and at the mute appeal in his eyes, she hesitated. "Please, I'm not trying to sell you anything. I need help—I—I."

"I can't help you if you refuse to answer."

"All right then," Kelsy answered slowly. "I'll have to—to tell it my own way. I just want you to know it sounds crazy but—" He stopped and hunted vainly in his pockets.

Dr. Cory pushed the cigarette pack towards him.

"Light up."

"Thanks. Well you see it started soon after I came out of the hospital."

"What—why were you in a hospital?"

"Oh. Sorry. General Hospital. You see they picked me up one night, that is the police did. I'd been hit by a car and I was—well they thought I was unconscious. I guess it wasn't too serious." He stopped at the look on her face.

"Mr. Kelsy, you *must* answer some direct questions otherwise we'll be here half the night."

The man nodded meekly.

Dr. Cory picked up a pencil, discarded it with a smothered unladylike remark and found another with a decent point. "Full name, age and occupation, please?"

"Frederick Jacob Kelsy. Uh—thirty-six last month. I used to be a salesman for Carson's Jewelry Supply."

Persis bit savagely at the eraser. "*Present* occupation, if you don't mind."

"Night watchman. The same place."

Dr. Cory rubbed her chin with the top of the pencil. "We'll come back to that later. When did this accident happen?"

"About five weeks ago, April 6th to be exact. I was coming home from a company league bowling match. It was quite late at night and I'd missed the bus. I live pretty far out in the suburbs but one of the fellows gave me a lift part of the way. I told him I'd walk the rest of the way."

"Are you married, Mr. Kelsy?"

Her patient smiled shyly. "Never got around to it. I bought the house and my mother took care of things for ten years. When she died—I didn't want to give it up. Always hated apartments and hotels anyway. I'm—I used to be a pretty good housekeeper."

Persis was beginning to like Mr. Kelsy. She shared his views on apartment cubicles and hotel rooms.

"My fault Mr. Kelsy, but we seem to have got off the track. The accident, remember?"

"Oh yes. Well, I guess I had some sort of temporary paralysis. I don't know what they did but I was able to move my arms and legs again. They kept me for a couple of days. Observation they called it, X-rays and all that—"

"I'd better call the hospital," interrupted the doctor. Kelsy smoked two of her cigarettes during the phone call.

Persis hung up and addressed her patient. "Except for some abrasions and minor bruises, nothing serious. The paralysis might have been caused by a nerve pinch in the spine but the tests didn't show any damage. You're a bit of a mystery to them."

Kelsy nodded. "Yeah. They told me to take it easy for a few days, which I did. I had a kind of sore feeling all right, but that wasn't anything." His face darkened and he looked down at the floor again. "I was told to see you. She said you were the only one who could help me."

Dr. Cory lifted her eyebrows. "She?"

"An old woman, dressed like a gypsy. Has a little hole in the wall place near where I eat at night."

Dr. Cory's indulgent smile vanished. She sat stiffly in her chair. "Keep talking, Mr. Kelsy, you can't stop now."

Kelsy hunched his shoulders, his hands crushing the hat on his lap. "She told me the Cory's were witching folk from way back." His voice was low, barely audible. "I asked her if she knew what was wrong with me and she said yes but she couldn't help me."

Dr. Cory pressed her hands against the top of the desk. "Great Mother preserve us from all the old blabbermouth fools!" Suddenly she rummaged in the desk drawer and produced a small cloth bag.

"Hold out your hand," she commanded.

Kelsy stretched out his arm. With catlike swiftness she brushed the sack against the back of his hand. Kelsy jerked back with a yelp of pain and astonishment. He stared at the red weal which raised in puffed flesh below the first knuckle joints.

The woman looked at him grimly, the bag still clutched in her hand. "Well—go on Mr. Kelsy."

"She said—she said I was becoming a vampire." Kelsy really whispered this time.

"That," said Dr. Cory, rising from her chair, "is the understatement of the year." She moved toward the door. "Stay right in that chair and not a peep out of you or I'll really clobber you."

The doctor did not leave the room but called to her receptionist. "Emmy, you'd better cancel the rest of them for the afternoon."

There was a murmured reply.

"All right. Ask Mrs. Sawyer to step into the other room. I'll see her in a minute."

Dr. Cory closed the door and turned to her patient: "I'll try to help you but you'll have to co-operate. You and Grandma Dingle sure have kicked the pot in the fire for me this time!" She gave him a parting glare, "And next time bring your own cigarettes!"

She was back in a short time and settled herself behind the desk again. "Diabetic. Went off her diet again, the idiot."

She picked up the depleted cigarette package and after lighting up pushed the package towards him. "Oh go ahead. The fact that you still enjoy smoking is encouraging."

She leaned back and blew a vast cloud of smoke at the ceiling "First things first. You realise of course that I could be kicked out of the profession if you do any talking about this visit."

Kelsy nodded gratefully. "Doctor I'll be as quiet as the grave about—"

Persis winced. "Please—not that word."

"What about that old gypsy—uh, Grandma Dingle you called her?"

Persis looked at him coldly. "She just contracted laryngitis as of now. She knows why and she won't do any more talking for a while. To anyone."

Kelsy hitched his chair forward. "I was wondering—"

"We won't do any poking in my family closet, Mr. Kelsy, if you don't mind! I'm the first of my line to break away from the family tradition and I want to keep it that way."

"Sure. Okay doctor." Kelsy stroked his inflamed hand. Persis looked at the red mark. "I'll dress that for you before you leave. I want to find out when all this started. Right after your accident?"

"Uh huh. I began to get this craving for rare steaks. Got to the point where it was embarrassing. Most of the eating places didn't serve raw meat, so I did a lot of my—uh—eating at home. I never used to drink much except maybe a beer or two with the fellows after bowling. Now it seems I want wine and even the stronger stuff and well—"

"Where did you meet Grandma Dingle?"

"Let's see. Oh yeah, I'd run out of meat at home one night. I went into a little bar on Second Street where they serve raw ground beef sandwiches. I was in one of the booths eating and having a Bloody Mary. She was doing one of those palm reading things around the place and she came up to me to see if I wanted my fortune told."

Dr. Cory nodded.

"At first I tried to brush her off but she had a good pitch so I gave in. I guess I was sort of wishing someone would tell me the score." Kelsy sighed and reached for the cigarette package. "Well, she looked at my palm, then all of a sudden she stopped talking and let my hand drop. Shook up acting. She looked at the stuff on the table and got up and handed me her card. Said I needed more than a palm reading and I'd better come to her place."

"And you did of course."

"Sure. She had me interested. That's when she came up with that—that vampire business. I got fed up then and told her I was leaving. That's when she gave me your name and address. Funny, she wouldn't take any money either."

Persis leaned forward, propping her chin on folded hands. "You changed your work about the same time your eating habits became abnormal, didn't you?"

Kelsy nodded. "I couldn't stay awake in the daytime. Of course my sales dropped to nothing. The boss was nice about it. When Sullivan the night watchman quit, I got his job. Doesn't pay much but I manage."

"When did you decide to consult me?"

Kelsy shuddered. "That night just before I was due on the job. I was in this bar having my usual—well you know what. A couple of good looking ba—uh—girls came in. I'm not a woman hater, doctor, I've had some dates in the past—but so help me—all I could think of, sitting there looking at them was—was—"

"How good their blood would taste?"

Kelsy looked shocked and gratified at the same time.

"That's it exactly doctor. I left there in a hurry."

"Something you said a while back," mused the doctor.

"I was trying to remember . . ."

Dr. Cory was a very pretty woman, thought Kelsy, especially when her black eyes glowed and those luscious lips pursed in thought. Very red they were too, just the colour of . . . he fought in silent panic against the pang of hunger that shot through him.

"Oh yes," Persis had not noticed his discomfort. "You said, 'they thought I was unconscious' when the ambulance brought you to the hospital?"

"I'd—I've forgotten," Kelsy stammered, "I was numb, couldn't feel anything, couldn't move my arms or legs. I knew when the cop was shining his light around and when they loaded me on the stretcher. But there was some—something else before that."

"Yes, go on." Dr. Cory's eyes blazed into his.

The man's forehead was shiny with perspiration now. His voice strained to continue, "I guess I didn't want to remember. It hurt for just a moment when—when—"

"You *must* remember. I think this is the key to the whole thing."

Kelsy rocked back and forth in his chair. "I—I—it hurt, I tell you! When it came sniffing up to me, I couldn't move. And it was there for the longest time, crouching over me, waiting. And I could feel something inside of me waiting too and swelling up—Oh God! Then it hurt! When it jumped over me—" Kelsy came out of his chair, straight up, his face contorted in remembered anguish. "The cat! That's when it hurt, when the cat jumped over me—" He folded and collapsed loosely on the floor.

When he regained consciousness, he was on the examination table and Dr. Cory was unhooking a stethoscope from her ears. "Feeling a little better now?"

"How'd I get here up on this table?"

"Emmy and I managed," she answered briefly, stabbing his finger deftly with a blood lancet. "I want to make some routine tests."

Persis busied herself with the hemacytometer, tested his blood pressure, peered into his eyes through the ophthalmoscope and finished up with a reflex testing that involved the skilful use of a small rubber mallet. After that he was allowed to climb down from the table and re-button his shirt.

"Physically there's nothing wrong with you that a basic examination will show, but I had to know something about your condition." Persis frowned and tapped the case history card against the desk. Kelsy again was making inroads on her cigarettes. He felt quite relaxed and better than he had for days.

"Can you—that is—is there any chance that I can be cured?"

Dr. Cory shrugged. "I believe so, but here's where orthodox medicine and I, or rather both of us, part company."

"Can you tell me anything about—vampires?" Fred asked with an awkward effort at lightness. "After all if I'm—that is if—"

She came to his rescue. "Let's bring it out in the open. You are infected with certain—um, traits of vampirism. One curious fact, which is going to be of considerable help, is that you were cursed when you were still alive. All through history there have been instances of true vampires created when cats were startled or frightened into jumping over the dead. In the days before funeral parlours, the open casket in the house

and the wanderings of the pet cat were an unfortunate combination."

"I saw Dracula in the movies," shuddered Kelsy. "If I thought I was going to end up like that, I'd—I'd kill myself."

"That would be the worst thing you could do, for yourself or everyone else," said Persis sternly. "Then, indeed, you would be a true vampire."

"Well, what am I now?"

"I would say that you are—um—an embryonic vampire," said Persis with proper clinical caution. "I'd better start your treatment immediately."

"We'll begin with counter-suggestion." Persis smiled at her patient. "Hypnosis requires your co-operation."

Kelsy looked dubious. "I'm ready of course. Anything you say—but I thought you said you weren't qualified for treating mental illness."

"If this was the ordinary psychosis or mental disturbance type of thing, I would have sent you to a psychiatrist. This is my own ground. I'm a witch, remember? Witchcraft and its teachings antedated the modern medical practitioner. I may use some of the old tools of the trade when there's reason to do so. However we're wasting time. Are you ready?"

Fred nodded and at her direction relaxed in the chair.

He did not see where it came from but suddenly the tiny ball was there, suspended over her desk. It spun on its invisible axis, bright in the rays from the desk lamp at first, but that too faded in the encroaching darkness. The little sphere glowed with inward illumination in the black space in which he too now existed, but growing in size as he fell headlong toward it. He did not fear its misty gigantic size, knowing in some obscure fashion that his fall would be cushioned. He was in the mist now, luminescent around him and he breathed the fiery, but pleasant tang of its essence. He had slowed, hovering in the fragrant clouds, relaxed and sleepy, in fact so drowsy that he just had to doze off a bit.

Kelsy felt his chin hit his breastbone as he snapped into wakefulness. He was slumped in his chair before Dr. Cory's desk. That personable medic was looking at him intently. She had lost some of her carefully groomed appearance. One lock of black hair hung over her forehead which was beaded with a ladylike perspiration.

"Whew!" breathed Persis. "I haven't worked this hard in years. Takes it out of me."

"What happened?" Fred yawned and sat up in the chair. "I must have dozed off."

The glittering ball had disappeared and Persis hastily put away a black handled dirk.

"What's the knife for?" asked Kelsy interestedly. "Am I liable to get violent or what?"

Persis chuckled. "My Athame—one of the tools I mentioned."

She did not elaborate, but went on, "You've had your first session and I think you'll notice some improvement."

Kelsy wrinkled his forehead, then shrugged. "Sorry, I don't feel any different."

"How about a nice, well cooked pork chop with a glass of beer?"

"Say now! I didn't have any lunch and—" He broke off for a moment. "Well! I'll be—no I won't be—but that sounds *good*! Whaddye know." He grinned and shook his head in happy disbelief. Dr. Cory dabbed at her brow and brushed the hair lock back into place. She wrote several prescriptions, which Kelsy accepted. He looked at the cryptic scribbles with proper awe.

"No witches ointment, Vervain or powdered toad," said Dr. Cory smiling, "just some mild ferrous iron tablets which you take three times a day after meals. The other is for a few Butisol pills, a sedative. I want you to have a good night's sleep."

"When do I—?"

"About a week from now, at the same time. I'll have Emmy call you to confirm the appointment. And—Mr. Kelsy," she did not finish the sentence but placed her finger at her lips in a meaningful gesture. Kelsy nodded gravely.

Three weeks later, he found it difficult to leave at the end of the office call. He twiddled his hat, a new one incidently, and leaned against the doorway. They were alone as usual, Emmy having finished her day.

"I was wondering—"

"Yes, Mr. Kelsy?"

Fred shifted from one foot to the other. "Uh—you know the last treatment? The one where you drove the stake through my—my heart?"

"The symbolic stake, for heaven's sake!"

"Yeah. Well it worked fine. My chest was kind of sore for a while though, but that's all right. What I mean is I can't look a hamburger in the face any more."

"That would be very disconcerting," murmured Persis.

"How's that?"

"A hamburger with a face."

Kelsy chuckled then suddenly became wistful. "This is the last treatment, isn't it?"

Persis nodded. "I believe so, Fre—Mr. Kelsy. All we've done today is to emphasize the inhibitions I've planted in your subconscious self."

"Well, I was thinking as long as I'm cured maybe I could, that is—maybe we—" Kelsy swallowed the rest of the sentence and wrung out his hat.

"I think it would be very nice. I usually don't do this sort of thing but—where shall we eat?"

Fred stared numbly at her and a healthy flush spread over his face. "You will? Gee, that's just swell! Uh—how did you know what I was going to ask?"

Persis smiled at him and took off the white smock, substituting a grey tailored jacket that did a lot of good things for her figure.

"I—I made a couple of reservations at the Pink Poodle," said Kelsy, babbling slightly. "But I didn't—wasn't sure, after all—it's a lot of nerve on my part but—"

"I think it's an occasion," said Persis. "Shall I call a cab?"

"Oh no, Miss Persis—doctor I mean. I've got a surprise." Kelsy beamed. "It's up in the next block, I couldn't get any closer."

"You bought a car?"

"Yes ma'm! And that's not all. I'm getting my old job back again. How's that?"

"Wonderful. And for the rest of the evening, Fred, don't call me doctor. Persis will do very nicely."

Kelsy was reduced to a state of dithering happiness as he retreated to the outer reception room. On his way he dropped his hat twice, managed to step on it once and ended up by tripping over the end table.

"If you'll wait for me, Fred," called Persis, "I'll call my housekeeper and finish up a couple of things. Then we can walk over to your car."

"Wait a minute, Doc—uh, Miss, uh, Persis I mean. It's going to rain pretty quick. I'll go down and bring the car around to the entrance. Ought to be plenty of space now." He grabbed his raincoat and made for the door. "Won't be more than a couple of minutes. Be right out in front."

Persis called after him. "Don't rush, Fred, give me ten minutes at least."

"Right."

She heard the outer door close. Persis went back into the office to make a last minute check on her hospital calls in the morning. She planned to spend a little extra time in grooming also. She smiled again.

"He's cute," she murmured to herself. After all, he was a personable young man. A small inner voice reminded her that it was not quite ethical to date a patient. "An ex-patient" she reminded the inner voice. "Why not?"

Why not indeed. The therapy sessions had revealed a shared liking for many things. Also she had a sneaking desire to be sure the treatments had worked. What better way to check on Fred Kelsy's choice of menu? Perhaps she would be real devilish and order a Daiquiri. Oh well. Persis went in to the washroom to put on her best face.

Kelsy skidded to a stop in front of the elevator door and punched the button twice before he remembered that the operator went off duty at five in the afternoon. He shrugged and hurried to the stairwell. The janitor again had forgotten to switch on the hall lamps and the grey light from the single window left the stairs half shadowed in darkness. As he picked his way down, an old song came to mind and he hummed the few words he remembered—

"Happy days are here again—"

The feather touch against his ankle brought him to stop. He looked down into the shadows below, feeling the cold touch of fear at the back of his neck. Kelsy found it impossible to move as the touch became a rubbing pressure.

His heartbeat was loud in his own ears but he could hear the cat purring. How long he stood there, locked in his fright he could not tell but the stasis was broken by the sound of a door opening and closing.

"Damn," Persis' voice echoed in the hall. "The idiot's forgotten the lights again."

The welcome glow of a flashlight bobbed along the hallway preceding the tattoo of high heels. The flash picked out the rigid statue that was Kelsy.

"Fred! I thought you were—what's the matter?"

Kelsy opened his mouth and with a distinct effort unglued his tongue from the roof of his mouth. "Ugh—a—a—there's a cat down here."

The flashlight dipped toward the stair tread. A very small black kitten looked up at them unabashed, mewed a polite greeting and resumed stropping Kelsy's ankles. Persis giggled and picked up the fur ball.

"You little dickens. Where did you come from?" Little dickens butted his head in the crook of her elbow and turned up the volume of his purring.

"Phew!" Kelsy dug out his handkerchief and mopped at his face. Finally he tucked the cloth away and managed a weak smile. "I feel like an absolute sap."

Doctor Cory patted his arm. "There, there, Fred. I understand."

"It's just that for a minute—" Fred swallowed, "the same feeling I had back there—you know. Lying in that street—"

"Think no more about it," Persis said firmly. "I'll lead the way. These stairs are terribly dark and I intend to have a few words in the morning with tha—hold it!"

"Whu—" Kelsy stopped in time to avoid a collision of his midriff with her head.

"Look." Persis held the light on the steps just below them. A much used rag doll sprawled across the tread. One outflung arm pointed at the single roller skate poised with lethal precision for the unaware, oncoming foot.

"The newt-brained spawn of a witless toad!" Persis spat the archaic words out with iced venom.

"What—who—who?" said Kelsy inanely.

Persis inhaled lengthily. "Sorry. Reverting to type I guess." The flash danced momentarily in her hand. "I'm referring to the lack-witted daughter of our janitor."

Kelsy picked up the offending articles, holding them at arm's length. "Why—you might have been hurt!"

Persis stared at him. "And just where would you have been some minutes ago if Dickens here hadn't stopped you?"

The kitten made a quick dab, over her arm, at the rag doll. Kelsy nodded slowly but made no reply. After a moment he took the flashlight and led the way down the rest of the stairs. There were no further obstructions.

The lobby was deserted and they decided to wait out the rainfall which was diminishing. The sky was brighter, hinting at the late sunlight to come.

They sat on the bench, the kitten stretched out in Persis' lap. Fred reached out and stroked the tiny chin with a forefinger. Dickens responded with a happy blrt and extended his head for more, eyes closed in ecstasy.

"I wonder who it belongs to?"

"Me—now," answered Persis. "And it's not an it, he's a he."

"The janitor's daughter, maybe?" said Kelsy slyly.

Persis wrinkled her nose. "Poof. That kind probably beats all animals. Besides, don't you know that all witches have black cats?"

Kelsy grinned. "Planning to take him along then?"

"Certainly," said Persis stiffly. "After all he just saved two lives didn't he?"

"I wouldn't think of deserting him," said Kelsy. "It's just—well—I'm not sure if the Pink Poodle caters to little black cats and—"

"Oh my gosh! Our dinner date, of course. I forgot all about it for a moment—say, maybe we could take him to my house first—?"

Kelsy cleared his throat. "I—ah—I'm considered a pretty fair cook."

Persis stroked the cat. "I'm sure you are, Mr. Kelsy."

"Why don't you and—uh—Dickens have dinner with me at my house?"

"How daring and unconventional, Mr. Kelsy. What will your neighbours think?"

Kelsy assigned the neighbours to a specific mythological region.

"In that case, Dickens and I would be most happy to accept your kind invitation. What's to eat?"

Fred waved his hand expansively. "Place your order now, madam."

"Let me see." Her lips pursed in an enticing judicial pout. "I'll have small baking powder biscuits, Caesar salad, strong black coffee with Gouda cheese—oh first though, a Daiquiri."

"No meat," asked Kelsy.

Persis looked up at him obliquely. "A small Tenderloin steak—medium rare."

Fred's grin broadened. "Sounds good. I'll have the same with a couple of changes. Steak medium well done and a tall frosty ale to keep your Daiquiri company." He stood up and crooked an inviting elbow. "The sun's out. Shall we go?"

Doctor Persis Cory, witch extraordinary, smiled warmly. She settled Dickens on one arm and linked the other through Kelsy's. As they walked out, Dickens waved a farewell with his tail at the lobby.

—Leroy B. Haugrud.

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50th Issue . . .

Although I was unable to build a "special issue" for this mile-stone in the history of *Science Fantasy*—we do not use many short stories and it would have taken over a year to compile sufficient to make an issue similar to the 100th edition of *New Worlds Science Fiction*—this is nevertheless a rather proud moment for many of us. Just over ten years ago the first issue of this magazine saw publication with Walter H. Gillings as editor—a name and a personality around which the axis of British science fiction and fantasy had long revolved.

The magazine's arrival came out at a time when the genre was in a state of flux and similar magazines in America were going out of business for good. Although we did not know it, hard times were ahead: rising costs, production problems, and the loss of editor Gillings who retired owing to business commitments. Yet the storms were weathered and *Science Fantasy* has emerged as a strong and powerful force on the side of modern fantasy with an accumulation of much praise and many stories reprinted from its pages in other countries. At the moment, it is the *only* magazine of its type in the world and lends a sympathetic ear to any author who feels that he wants to write an off-trail story without the necessity of backing his plot with scientific concepts or theories.

To all the authors who have derived so much satisfaction from writing for this magazine in the past ten years and to all the unknown readers who must have enjoyed reading them—my grateful thanks and the promise of even better things to come.

As Walter H. Gillings phrased it in a Guest Editorial in No. 4, "*Science Fantasy* is not going to 'fold up' as so many magazines in this field have done in the past."

The prophecy is ten years old today.

John Carnell

STUDIES IN SCIENCE FICTION

This is the last in the present series of articles by Sam Moskowitz on the Old Masters of fantasy and science fiction and it is fitting that it should close upon two Englishmen who were so widely divergent in their writings.

15. Shiel and Heard

by SAM MOSKOWITZ

With the appearance of *The World, The Flesh and The Devil* in 1959, a screen classic was born focussing the spotlight on M. P. Shiel, whose famous world-catastrophe novel *The Purple Cloud* formed the basis of the story.

The streets of an apparently "empty" New York City, a situation achieved by producer ingenuity that represents an epic in itself, provided the "sets" of the film.

A Negro coal miner, trapped by a slide, finally digs his way out to find that he is apparently the only man alive in a world that has destroyed itself in a quick atomic war followed by deadly fallout. The coal miner travels across the United States in search of life. He eventually reaches the Hudson River and goes on to explore the echoing canyons of New York. With the exception of his own vehicle he finds that not a car moves, not a human being shows itself, nor does a boat pass.

When the Negro (for all he knows, the very last male on the face of the earth), eventually discovers a white woman surviving in New York, his pride prevents him from accepting her. He will not perceive that the monstrous tragedy that has overtaken the human race has expunged whatever purpose racial barriers might ever have possessed.

A white man comes drifting in from the sea and, appraising the situation, feels that the only solution is for he and the Negro to take guns and hunt one another until the conflict of colour is ended with a bullet.

Sickened by the senselessness of this "World War IV," the Negro finally throws aside his weapon and offers his opponent the opportunity to kill him. The white man cannot, and when the girl makes her selection it is obviously the Negro. As the white man turns to walk off, there is an unspoken signal between the Negro and the girl. The white man is asked to join them and the three walk off arm in arm.

The matter of whether or not the heavy racial turn at the picture's ending was necessary, since it was not a part of Shiel's original novel, is certainly open to question. It is even debatable that the screenplay was strengthened by this plot twist. What is not debatable is that for skill in contrivance, for a dramatic appeal to end all wars and as the most provocative thrust at colour lines ever dared, this film achieves a measure of distinction which cannot help but make it a classic.

Matthew Phipps Shiel, the tenth child and the only son of a Methodist preacher, was born on Montserrat, Leeward Islands in the West Indies July 21, 1865. Shiel speaks at some length and with affection of his Irish father in biographical reminiscences but for some reason never makes a direct reference to his mother.

Shiel claimed that his father did not preach for money and that his real source of income came from ships he owned. The reason for the implied reservation in the use of the word "claimed," rests in proven exaggerations and fabrications in many of Shiel's statements uncovered by his friend and biographer, the British poet, author and anthologist John Gawsworth. Shiel's assertion that, in a puckish frame of mind, his father once had him anointed king of an island in the West Indies by The Rev. Dr. Semper of Antigua, appears

to have some basis in fact. This event was said to have occurred July 21, 1880, when Shiel was 15 years old. The island was called Redonda, a five- or nine-square-mile chunk of rock depending on who was interviewing Shiel, which was eventually annexed by the British government. His father, he reported, maintained a running angry fight with the British government for fifteen years—but to no avail.

The younger Shiel had a private tutor on the islands and then was dispatched to King's College, London. Languages fascinated him and he acquired a facility at reading and writing a number of them, including Greek, Latin, Italian, French, Polish and Spanish; an aptitude which at one time qualified him to be accepted as an interpreter to the International Congress of Hygiene and Demography.

More important, his extensive knowledge of languages formed the foundation of a tremendous vocabulary, and translating the idioms of the many languages he knew into English produced an unorthodox and pyrotechnic style that made him the despair of purists and the envy of his fellow authors.

This style was first brought to the attention of the literati when Shiel tired of teaching mathematics after a year of it and, turning to medicine, found he had no stomach for the knife. He produced three detective stories which were published in book form in both England and the United States in 1895 under the title *Prince Zaleski*. Strongly smitten by Edgar Allan Poe at the age of 17 and conscious of the acclaim won by A. Conan Doyle for his Baker Street inspiration, what Shiel produced was "Sherlock Holmes in The House of Usher."

Prince Zaleski, a mysterious Russian, solved difficult crimes by brilliant deduction. M. P. Shiel personally assumed the role of "Dr. Watson," but instead of Baker Street there was quite literally a gothic castle with partially unwrapped mummies. The stories are primarily of historical interest, actually being no more than pastiches, occupying the same category as Maurice LeBlanc's Lupin or August Derleth's Solar Pons. Nevertheless, this book caused renowned novelist Arnold Bennet to later comment: "I read, and was excited by, *Prince Zaleski* when it first appeared."

Shiel's next book was a rather ordinary romance, *The Rajah's Sapphire*, published in 1896, followed within months by *Shapes in the Fire*, a collection of short stories. The latter volume is much sought after by Shiel collectors as the first hard-cover collection of a number of his most bizarre tales of horror, including *Xelucha*, *Tulsah* and *Vaila*, the last later rewritten under the title of *The House of Sounds*.

The style of all of them is beserk Poe with all genius spent.

Omitted from the collection was one of Shiel's better short stories, *Huguenin's Wife*, which appeared in *Pall Mall Magazine* for 1895. In this story, the protagonist rescues a young woman from a Greek mob which is out to kill her for setting up a temple to Apollo in the modern world. The woman attaches herself to Huguenin with great fervour and he marries her. An inspired artist, one of her too-realistic paintings of a great cat-like creature, covered with wings and feathers instead of fur, disgusts him so that he strikes her. She dies from the blow but her last words are : " You may yet see it in the flesh."

When the house catches fire and Huguenin, in a mental ferment, opens his wife's tomb he releases a living replica of her painting which tears his throat out.

It is very likely that *Huguenin's Wife* could have served as the inspiration of H. P. Lovecraft's tale, *Pickman's Model*, wherein a famous artist's monster paintings prove to have been posed by blasphemous creatures living in tunnels beneath New York.

In May, 1871, *Blackwood's Magazine* in England published anonymously a novelette titled *The Battle of Dorking*, which has since been attributed to George Chesney. This story realistically projects a future war where Great Britain, then the supreme nation of the Earth, is crushingly defeated and then humbled by its conquerors. The speculation created a deserved sensation with its amazingly prophetic analysis of the factors which would bring about the rise of communism and the future loss of Britain's colonies. There were a half-dozen or more sequels by as many authors, the most famous of them being *What Happened After the Battle of Dorking* and even such personal accounts as *Mrs. Brown on the Battle of Dorking*.

This sparked off a vogue for future war novels which reached its zenith when George Griffith added imaginative

inventions to the projected clash of nations in his best seller, *The Angel of the Revolution* and its sequel, *Olga Romanoff*, published in 1893 and 1894 respectively.

A popular author of the period, Louis Tracy, had cashed in on this cycle with *The Final War* issued in 1896. As a friend and collaborator, he prevailed upon Shiel to follow the trend, with the result that *The Empress of the Earth* was serialised in *Short Stories* magazine, England from February 5 to June 18, 1898, and the same year was published in book form as *The Yellow Danger*.

The concept that England might be conquered by the yellow men of Asia was Shiel's contribution to the literature of future wars. In later years, Shiel's publishers made the claim that the phrase, "The Yellow Danger" was coined by him, though it would seem that someone would have thought of it while the hordes of Genghis Khan were overrunning Europe.

The book suited the mood of the times and went into three editions in Britain and one in America. Through the lips of his Chinese strategist, Dr. Yen How, M. P. Shiel expresses his view of the inherent superiority of the white man over the yellow in the following comparison of navies: "Poh! Your Navy! Who built it for you? It was they. Your Navy is like a razor in the hands of an ape which has seen its master use it. The brute may or may not cut its own throat with it."

Yen How urges that the yellow races strike before the white man's progress has made the dream of yellow supremacy a forlorn hope. Uniting China and Japan, Yen How, through political manipulations in the Orient (where most leading European nations were involved at the turn of the century), sparks a frightful war on the continent. Chapter after chapter, Shiel spares no detail in describing the battle movements of every naval unit of the Great Powers of that period, even drawing sketches of the battle formations which are included in the book.

When Europe has almost exhausted itself in war, the Yellow Horde pours out of Asia, conquering everything up to the British channel.

A series of torpedoes aimed at the massed Chinese and Japanese fleet by the British starts a chain reaction of explosions which destroys the invaders' fighting units, turning the tide. Barges with twenty million Chinese are towed north into a maelstrom and sucked to the bottom of the sea. One

hundred and fifty Chinamen are injected with Cholera and released on the continent. The plague wipes out one hundred and fifty million. England thereby becomes ruler of the world, since the only remaining power, the United States, cannot remain a single free island in a world otherwise ruled by England, Shiel surmises. The quality and importance of this work are on a par with the plot outline.

Heartened by his success, Shiel's next science fiction novel, which appeared in 1901, was again a future war tale, but with a difference. Frequently referred to as the "second-best" of his novels, *The Lord of the Sea* reaches an intensity of anti-semitism that provokes comparison with Hitler's later *Mein Kampf*, for which it could easily have served as an inspiration.

This is the background: The Jews, after being systematically expelled from every nation in Europe for buying up half the land and holding mortgages on the rest (literally), flood into England, where they begin the process anew. One-third of all members of Parliament are Jews. After initial prosperity, the poor British farmers, who must pay rent to the Jews, bend heavy under the yoke.

The prime Jewish villain, Frankl, is pictured as lewdly grasping for Irish girls with "phylacteried left arm" (The Phylactery is an amulet containing passages from the Old Testament, strapped on by pious Jews before prayer on the Sabbath). He also routinely forecloses mortgages as a prelude to Sabbath rites. Frankl, described by one of Shiel's characters as a "dirty-livered Jew," is interrupted at his prayers by the hero, Richard Hogarth, who whips him with a riding crop.

Tired by his exertions, Richard Hogarth, whose physical description amazingly parallels that of Shiel returns home to receive the staggering news from his Irish father that he was actually born of Jewish parents, therefore he should take pride in his people: "*They* are the people who've got the money."

Framed by Frankl for the "murder" of a servant who actually committed suicide, Hogarth is sent to prison. He escapes, finds a meteorite on Frankl's property that is almost solid diamond, and with the money from its sale secretly constructs a number of huge floating forts, strategically placed to command the seas. He exacts tribute from every ship that passes and becomes not only the "Lord of the Sea," but the highest official of England.

In this capacity he has Parliament pass a law stating : " No Jew might own or work land, or teach in any Cheder or school, or be entered at any Public School or University, or sign any stamped document, or carry on certain trades, or vote, or officiate at any public service, and so on ; parentage, not religion, constituting a ' Jew '."

In a fit of generosity, the Jews are reimbursed for their lands and Palestine, then almost a wasteland, inhabited by 300,000 nomads, given to them to settle upon if they so desire. Scarcely have the Jews left England, when the British government, through stealth accomplishes what it had been unable to do by force and succeeds in scuttling most of Hogarth's forts.

His power gone, Hogarth reveals that he is a Jew and is himself banished to Palestine where he is revealed to be a new incarnation of Jesus who, for the next sixty years, rules his people, teaching them : " Thou shall not steal, therefore Israel with some little pain attained to this."

Only in his prediction that Palestine would flourish under the Jews does Shiel's novel show any merit, either as prophecy, prose or decency. It need scarcely be emphasized that the only difference between his credo and Nazism rests in the fact that he would have permitted the Jews to emigrate with their lives.

The same year as *The Lord of the Sea*, Shiel's most applauded novel, *The Purple Cloud*, was serialized in *The Royal Magazine*, London, January to June, 1901 in six instalments and in September of that year attained publication in hard covers. This is justifiably the most highly regarded of Shiel's works and the one that eventually brought him literary recognition as well as, in his old age, a pension for "his services to literature" from the British government.

In delivering Shiel's funeral oration before an audience of thirteen on February 24, 1947, Edward Shanks, himself noted for an end-of-the-world story, *People of the Ruins*, which was admittedly inspired by Shiel's epic, said: " In speaking of Shiel it is difficult not to give the impression that he was a ' one-book ' man. To some extent at any rate, that he must always be. There is a parallel case worth mentioning. Herman Melville will always be first and foremost the author of *Moby Dick*. For as many generations ahead as one can see, critics and readers will continue to pay, at any rate, lip service to that one book. But among the readers thus influenced, some

will always seek in other books the qualities, however attenuated, which made that one great.

"So it will be with Shiel."

The Purple Cloud shows strong influence of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *The Last Man* in its seemingly interminable yet individually potent episodes describing a world from which virtually all human life has departed. When the book was written, the pole had not been reached. A bequest by Charles P. Stickney of Chicago (a character who also appears in *Lord of the Sea*) offering \$175 million to the first man to reach the pole inspires the organization of an arctic exploratory team. A physician named Adam Jeffson succeeds, with the aid of his lady friend, in doing away with a member of the party so that he may be substituted. After many hardships, the objective is reached and the area is found to be littered with diamonds from meteorites attracted by the pole's magnetism. Killing most of his party, Jeffson, in passages reminiscent of *The Captain of the Pole Star* by A. Conan Doyle, makes his way overland to the sea to find those left aboard the ship are dead. On reaching civilization, he discovers that the entire earth is a vast graveyard. The cause: a purple gas issuing from fissures which has killed everyone.

On this device, H. G. Wells commented: "No one can dispute that some great emanation of vapour from the interior of the earth, such as Mr. Shiel has made a brilliant use of in his *Purple Cloud*, is consistent with every demonstrated fact in the world."

Jeffson's twenty year detailed search through the ruins of the world, since it is presented in synoptic diary form with frequent self-conscious flarings of rhetoric, is scarcely easy reading. Nor is the description of Jeffson's shift toward madness that causes him to burn city after city particularly pleasant. Neither is his unreasonable brutality when he finally discovers a girl alive, who was so young when the catastrophe occurred that she doesn't even know how to speak.

The reaction one gets on finishing the novel is similar to that experienced on completing Franz Kafka's grim *Metamorphosis*: It was worth reading, but you would hate to do it again!

Primarily as a result of this novel, Shiel received high praise from such great literary names as Arthur Machen, Jules

Claretie, Hugh Walpole, J. B. Priestley and Charles Williams. Shiel, though weak at plotting, was a writer's writer stylistically. His mad literary rhythms, seemingly improvised, like a jazz artist's at a jam session, were a bubbling fountain at which new techniques of phrasing could be drunk. While the artistry was rarely sustained, it had flashes of splendour. For 1901, a passage like: "Pour, pour, came the rain, raining as it can in this place, not long, but a torrent while it lasts, dripping in thick liquidity like a profuse sweat through the wood . . ." anticipated the method of men like Thomas Wolfe at a much later date.

Again Shiel turned to the future war theme for *The Yellow Wave*, published in 1905. This is really a love story projected against the background of a war between Russia and Japan which threatens to involve the other nations of the world that have at last learned the ways of peace. Never one to coddle his lead characters, Shiel sacrifices the two lovers at the end to bring peace between the combatants.

In *The Last Miracle*, published in 1906, fiction is once more used as a vehicle to project another of Shiel's violent hatreds, one as fanatical as that against the Jews. Though the son of a minister, Shiel's almost paranoid vilification of organized religion knew no bounds. He felt that the only true religion was science and that science was the only thing that up-lifted a man, whereas to the great faiths he attributed most, if not all, the blame for man's problems and ignorance.

In this novel, a scientist, through undisclosed means, causes the disappearance of people and their various crucifixions appear as "visions" in churches throughout the world. The novel terminates so abruptly as to be virtually unfinished. Its purpose seems to be a vast orgiastic diatribe against religion, rather than the telling of a story. For the solutions of men's problems, Shiel offers, in notes to the book, some deep breathing exercises which resulted in unfavourable, but deserved, comparison with Bernarr Macfadden, who, even then, was promoting "physical culture" to commercial success.

In the case of Shiel, his *style* of relation was so spectacular that many tend to think all his books are fantasies. Collectors read and collect his books for the bizarreness of his method, regardless of their literary classification. Therefore, while other titles written during the same period as those reviewed,

such as *Contraband of War*, *Cold Steel*, *The Man-Stealers*, *The Weird O' It*, *Unto the Third Generation*, *The Evil That Men Do*, *The Lost Viol*, *The White Wedding*, *The Isles of Lies* and *This Knot of Life* might interest the devotee of Shiel, they are not science fiction or fantasy.

One of them, *This Knot of Life*, is of importance, however, inasmuch as it strengthens the certainty of Shiel's pro-Nazism. In many of his books appear the superman, forerunner of the super race. Shiel has a new term for such men. He calls them the "Overmen" and, in *This Knot of Life*, admits to having derived the term from the German word "Übermensch". To round out his theories, his villain is a fiendish Jew named Sam Abrahams. In this respect, it would be a challenge for a scholar to find a single Shiel book in which there is not a direct or inferred slur at the Jews, usually accompanied by another at religion. *The Dragon*, issued in 1913 and later reprinted as *The Yellow Peril* in 1929, is no exception—therein he classifies a group of English traitors as: "pure Jews, only, with their bad heredity, lacking the brains of Jews."

As might be inferred by the title under which it is reprinted, *The Yellow Peril* is almost a paraphrase of *The Yellow Danger*. Again, a diabolical Chinaman ("the only man who can outwit a Jew in business is a Chinaman—don't forget") sets the European nations at one another's throats so they are weakened for the poised Oriental invasion. The Chinese again come galloping across Asia and Europe like a movie retake. Shiel heartily approves of this, because it will destroy Christianity and religion: "Good!" he says, "Now, the scientist denies that apes, Negroes, bishops, bouzies, dervishes, are religious."

In the nick of time, when England is about to be invaded, the Overman ("Übermensch") comes up with a ray that blinds all the invaders. The Overman issues the following dictum, which was the essence of Shiel's life-long philosophy: "That Great Britain be considered my private property by right of Conquest.

"That taxes (except 'death-duties') be abolished; and 'customs.'

"That citizens be liable to daily drill, including running and breathing. (At the age of 70, Shiel claimed he was still running six miles a day for health purposes).

"That Research and Education be the nation's main activities.

"That Education, transport, power, medicine and *publishing* be taken over by the government.

"That Doctors be 'consecrated'; and be Bachelors of Science; and be taught in 'Consecration' that 'To the pure, all things are pure.'

"That Clergymen now leave off uttering in public, for money, whatever comes to seem childish to average people."

With this book, Shiel ended a period of eighteen years of continuous writing and did not resume again for ten years. The only other book worthy of serious attention in this era is the short story collection *The Pale Ape*, issued in 1911, which contains some of Shiel's better short stories including the previously reviewed *Huguenin's Wife*, as well as a unique detective character, King Cummings Monk who is somewhat of a ventriloquist in addition to his deductive accomplishments.

The purchase of *The Purple Cloud* as possible material for a motion picture in 1927 probably motivated Shiel's revival of interest in the writing of science fiction. Though the book was considered as the basis of a dozen screen plays, it remained side-tracked, though not forgotten by Sol. C. Siegal, who bought an option on the novel in 1956 after he ascended to the position of vice-president of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Shiel ventured into science fiction again the following year, this time with a short story titled 2073 A.D., which, despite its minor length, was serialised in *The Daily Herald*, an English newspaper, on March 12, 13, 14 and 15, 1928. Later, it was included in a collection titled *The Invisible Voices* as *The Future Day*. This is an undistinguished piece of work, dealing with a future in which all cities are suspended in the air and men ride about in "air boats." A girl, wishing to test the bravery of her poet suitor, pretends that the power has failed in her "air boat," and that they will fall to earth. He comes through with flying colours and she agrees to marry him.

Though well into his sixties and living alone after his second wife left him in 1929, (his first wife died after only five years) a great deal of energy and venom still remained in Shiel when he wrote *This Above All*, a fable of immortality, published in 1933. Based on the topic of the eternal woman, possibly inspired by Karel Capek's *The Makropulos Secret*, Shiel's volume centres around a Jewess (Salome, of legend ?)

who has come down through the ages as an imperishable thirteen-year-old, and her efforts to get Lazarus (who is still alive after being touched by the hand of Christ centuries earlier) to marry her. In the meanwhile, so as not to get rusty while waiting, she has married a whole string of mortal men whom she discards as they age. The plot is constantly being interrupted while she emits interminable blasts against Christianity and religion, advocates science and research as well as long fasts, and slow and silent eating (preferably honey and nuts).

It soon develops that Jesus is still alive and that Jesus, Lazarus and the "young" girl are all members of a special race of long-lived human beings. Here, Shiel attempts to alter the theological picture of Jesus. While he concedes that the man was basically good and kind, he warns that he was also a Jew and, if alive, might favour his own people. He also retranslates and reinterprets passages from the original Greek, indicating that Jesus may have occasionally imbibed too much wine, and that he was really not against divorce. By this time, the reader must make a decision ; does Shiel hate Jews because they created Christianity, or does he hate Christianity because it was created by Jews ?

If the book has any worthwhile message, it lies in the preachment that age-immortality does not mean wisdom. Shiel, himself, seems an excellent case in point.

Probably Shiel's single best short story is *The Place of Pain*, to be found in the collection, *The Invisible Voices*, published in 1935. It deals with a Negro preacher in British Columbia, once highly respected in the community, who falls from grace and declines into drunkenness after apparently making an unusual discovery in the wilderness. This discovery he eventually confides to a white man who has been kind to him, when he feels he is dying from tuberculosis. It seems that he had accidentally found that a rock placed in the water in a mass of froth at the bottom of a waterfall would convert it into a pool that acted as the convex lens of a telescope. Through this lens, he implies having seen nightmarish and monstrous sights on the moon. He dies just as he wades out to place the stone in the correct spot to form a lens for the white man to look through.

The story is magnificently handled and Shiel exercises unaccustomed restraint in its telling. Though the Negro does

not duplicate his discovery for the reader or actually describe what he saw on the moon, one is led to believe that he is telling the truth. If there is any flaw, it is that Shiel cannot exercise his racial prejudice, as demonstrated by: "He had called them frankly a pack of apes, a band of black and babbling babies; said that he could pity them from his heart they were so benighted, so lost in darkness; that what they knew in their woolly nuts was just nothing."

The last important work of fiction that Shiel wrote was *The Young Men Are Coming*, and it is at once one of his most imaginative and one of his most damning novels. A sort of super flying saucer lands in England and fantastic flaming haired creatures whisk away an ageing Dr. Warwick. They travel three times the speed of light to the first moon of Jupiter. There, the unhatched egg of one of the space creatures engages Dr. Warwick in a prolonged discussion on philosophy, science, sociology and religion. Dr. Warwick is given a draught of immortality and a parting message from the space creatures: "Farewell. I bear you this message from the Egg's Mother; that she sets a detector to resonance with your rays: so, if in an emergency worthy of her notice you, having on your psychophone, send out your soul in worship to her, she still journeying in this eastern region of worlds, your wish will reach her."

Returned to Earth and immortal, Dr. Warwick organizes the "Young Men" into a group of storm troopers to defeat the "old men" who are planning a "fascistic" movement. The political goal of the "Young Men" is to overthrow religion and substitute science (reason) in its place.

A revolutionary war with force of arms ensues. To win over the people, Dr. Warwick tells them he will perform a *scientific* "miracle" and challenges religion to duplicate, top or stop him. He sends a message out to the space creatures to create a universal storm, thereby illustrating the power of science over religion. They respond with a globular hurricane which sinks land masses, drowns or kills millions, and inadvertently destroys the air fleet of the "old men" who have the "young men" just about licked in a fair fight.

As far as bloodshed is concerned, Shiel scoffs at the notion that "The next war will wreck civilization." Wars are merely "inconveniences," he avers flauntingly, concluding: "*Cursed* are the meek! For they shall *not* inherit the earth."

If one were to assume the role of an apologist for M. P. Shiel, what could be said for him? It could be said that while he made no impact on mainstream literature, he did make a minor, if flawed, contribution to science fiction. It might be said that faults aside, his work displayed unquestioned erudition and scholarship, and that there were honest flashes of power and brilliance in his writing.

It would have to be admitted that, in the psychiatrist's vernacular, the man had a "problem." The manifestations of that problem were obvious, but its cause can only be speculated. Remember, Richard Hogarth in *The Lord of the Sea* comes very close to being a replica of Shiel down to the three moles on the cheek and the Irish father. Somewhere along the line did Shiel learn something about his ancestry that he could not reconcile with his early religious training? Is there a link between this information and a mother of whom he never speaks? Was it really the perennial Jewish villain, Dinka, speaking in *The Young Men Are Coming*, "If I am a bit of a Hebrew inside, isn't my coat as Christian as they make 'em?", or is it Shiel?

It is a classic irony of our time, that a man who was an anti-Semite, anti-Christ, anti-Negro, anti-Oriental, an ardent believer in Aryan superiority and a war lover is to be posthumously ennobled as an apostle of peace and racial tolerance every time *The World, The Flesh and The Devil* is shown, as it will be for many years to come.

Shiel's concept that religion must be destroyed for the benefit of the masses and the world run by the pure application of science and reason was ably challenged by a talented British author, Henry Fitzgerald Heard. The type of government Shiel had advocated now existed in Nazi Germany. The Jews had been exterminated and science was being used to conquer and enslave nations and "reason" was employed to keep the masses in bondage through falsified legalities, The Big Lie and the fiction of race supremacy.

Heard preached that science and reason could not provide their own morality. That a morality to fit progress could only be creatively devised and nurtured by religion. "There can be no dispute between science and religion," Heard states. "Science discovers and religion evaluates. Science produces facts: religion arranges them in a comprehensive frame and scale of meaning."

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Up until 1943 when Heard's short story *The Great Fog* appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, most thought that he had no more serious considerations in the world than writing ingenious detective stories. As a literary work *The Great Fog* is all but nullified by grievous scientific inadequacies, but it suited the mood of the times. In the story, a mildew mold develops, which throws off an impenetrable fog, curtailing man's activities to such an extent that the great matrix of modern civilisation crumbles. The old order is replaced by a more rural, more religious, more considerate community of humans.

"Yes, I suspect we were not fit for the big views, the vast world into which the old men tumbled up," one of Heard's characters philosophizes. "It was all right to give men the open. But, once they had got power without vision, then either they had to be shut up or they would have shot and bombed everything off the earth's surface. Why, they were already living in tunnels when the fog came. And out in the open, men, powerful as never before, nevertheless died by millions, died the way insects used to die in a frost, but died by one another's hands."

This was pretty deep stuff for a man whose detective novels (*A Taste For Honey*, *Reply Paid* and *Murder by Reflection*) had won widespread critical acclaim. But Heard was going serious. They took *The Great Fog* and put it into a book in 1944, along with several other science fiction and fantasies. The longest was *Wingless Victory*, a satiric utopia wherein a race of highly intelligent penguins is discovered at the South Pole. A tour of their civilization by a human provides an enlightening contrast with our own. Like *The Great Fog* and other fantasies in the collection, *Wingless Victory* is no triumph of literary craftsmanship, but it had something to say.

Three years later the appearance of *Dopplegangers*, "an Episode of the Fourth, the Psychological Revolution, 1997," heralded the fact that Heard was not only capable of thinking, but of blending his thoughts and philosophies into a novel that is a masterpiece by the standards of science fiction. It belongs in the same category as '1984,' both in purpose and literary quality, yet it warns that the frightful dictatorial world displayed in George Orwell's gruesome classic can reach us "Deceptively concealed in silk and velvet."

Heard's method has much more reality in a rich country like the United States than does Orwell's.

The rulers of 1997 control the people by giving them every luxury and pleasure, keeping them physically so comfortable and mentally so cheerful that there is no seeming need or will to question their government. Yet, they are just as much helpless slaves as are the people of George Orwell's '1984.'

A small group of thinkers, who have an organized "underground," are relentlessly hunted and when captured, their brains are operated upon to excise their rebellious characteristics. Mass hypnotism is also practiced by the rulers to keep the masses in thrall.

One of the underground, tiring of ceaseless violence, attempts to escape to another country, but he is captured and surgically recreated to be an actual physical image of the ruler, Alpha. Thus, the origin of the title, "Doppelganger" or "double" taken from the German.

The Doppelganger takes care of routine governmental functions, thus freeing the ruler from a great deal of drudgery. However, the Doppelganger's fight against the government originally sprang from deeply religious moral grounds, he finds the murderous violence of the underground as offensive as the more sophisticated abominations of the government he now rules. He eliminates the underground and restores to the people a chance to start all over again.

The appeal of this story rests in the consummate artistry with which it is told. Though crammed with tens of thousands of words of philosophic debate, it moves in a polished manner with the suspense and breakneck speed that characterised A. E. van Vogt's better novels, such as *Slan* and *The Weapon Makers*. It is a modern "Utopia in Reverse" that can boast stature as entertainment as well as in subject matter.

The difference in Heard's approach to man's problems as compared to Shiel's is epitomized by *The Lost Cavern*, the title story of a collection published in 1948. Here, a man enters a Mexican cave and is captured by hideous, gigantic bats possessing a high degree of intelligence and an established culture. As he surveys their civilization and listens to their bizarre notions of the nature of the universe, evaluates their seemingly ludicrous moral code and studies their hopes and aspirations, he gradually feels that there is an affinity between mankind and these super-bats; that the human race is as grotesquely groping for the unknowable as are these frighten-

ingly formed cave dwellers. Eventually, he overcomes his initial disgust and establishes a sort of empathy with them.

Deliberately carried to the extreme of narrowly averting becoming a horror tale, *The Lost Cavern* provides an effective plea for tolerance in mankind's relations. It underlines the point that a foreign people or another religion, even when seemingly misguided, may be sincerely seeking enlightenment, and understanding. Conversely, it asks us to objectively stand off and evaluate our own cultural aspirations and judge if they do not at times seem a little strange, even to us.

It is too early to properly evaluate H. F. Heard in perspective. Technically, he should be considered together with a science fiction writer like C. S. Lewis who is also stressing moral and religious values in his work. However, the contrast between his ideas and those of Shiel's functions to bring both of them emphatically into bas-relief.

It also dramatizes how rich, colourful and varied are the threads from which the fabric of science fiction is woven.

—Sam Moskowitz

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